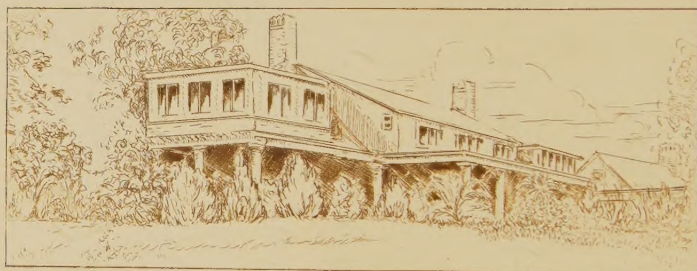




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MADAME DE STAËL

MADAME DE STAËL

HER LIFE AS REVEALED IN HER WORK

1766-1800

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY
OF A MIND AND SOUL

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PREFACE

(*Written in English by the Author for the English Version*)

THE later Madame de Staël is well enough known to readers of early 19th century memoirs: in person, stoutish, somewhat rough-featured and high-complexioned, with extraordinary flashing black eyes; in dress, startling, a green turban swathed round her head, a general tendency to over-decoration; in manner, autocratic, a trifle stagey, punctuating her phrases with a piece of paper, rolled in the fashion of a wand and wielded eloquently by her right hand. Thus she came to London in 1813, hated by Napoleon and therefore welcome, already in good repute amongst our blue-stockings, and disposed, on slight provocation, to give readings of her great work, *De l'Allemagne*, the manuscript of which had evaded the Napoleonic police and fled with its author, by way of Russia and Stockholm to the "Isle of Saints."

Madame de Staël was known as a great talker, dramatically indiscreet, confounding the Prince of Wales and Samuel Rogers in her interrogations, in short, the most notorious European exponent of the since much developed art of button-holing. She was avoided or sought after according to the various characters of her potential victims and according to their moods. Bryon, like Goethe some years earlier, did both. Those who cultivated her were impressed by the extraordinary vivacity and good sense of her conversation, and no less by the atmosphere of energy which she radiated.

The present reputation of this lady rests upon the

PREFACE

report of her contemporaries and upon the some seventeen volumes of her collected works. Between these two no greater contrast could be imagined. The 1820 edition, rushed out to catch the market after the death of Madame de Staël, is still, in the absence of others, the best. It is unpleasantly austere in aspect, clumsy to handle, imperfectly edited, and quite incomplete. In short, to the casual loiterer in a library, more like the gravestone of some forgotten Continental "Swan of Lichfield," than the literary testament of a lively mind. These works indeed half succeeded, towards the middle of the nineteenth century and before the advent of informed criticism, in destroying the original Madame de Staël and in substituting for her in the popular imagination the sawdust dummy of a *femme savante*. In their present state, it is plain that they are in the nature of a sunken prop, almost as much a danger as an aid to her reputation.

Madame de Staël's works ought, of course, to be able to stand by themselves and represent their author adequately to posterity. But the fact is, they misrepresent their author and require sympathetic interpretation. They were intended, on the one hand, as so many actions, interventions in the circumstances of the time; and to understand them, nothing short of a minute knowledge of the time will suffice. On the other, each is a circumstantial revelation of the state of Madame de Staël's soul at a given moment; and again one has to be familiar with the moment in the intimate sense, to read intelligently and with pleasure. A pamphlet and a confidence is a definition that describes any one of Madame de Staël's works with complete accuracy. One can leave the question of art aside: by that standard they fail, and there need be no question of inviting the plain reader to a literary feast which will probably disappoint him.

One can only hope, in the way of reasonable advocacy, to show what has happened to produce this

PREFACE

strange disparity between the historical legend and the literary fact. Chénedollé has explained exactly how *De la Littérature* was composed. The subject of the chapter in progress was thrashed out in conversation in the evening and written up the following day. It is thus with all Madame de Staël's works; they are the cold record of the morning after. The electricity, to use a word she favours, has gone out of them; the very language has changed. In conversation it was terse, epigrammatic, flashing; written, it is comparatively flat, full of the clichés and dull abstraction of the time. If Constant, instead of labouring over that too cunning masterpiece, *Adolphe*, had been content to play Eckermann to Corinne, both he and she would have had a better chance of immortality.

Something may be gleaned from her letters. Presumably, those she wrote to Constant were indeed burnt and, if so, it is a great pity. Her letters rank next to the lost spoken words in artistic value. Many of them have been published, a large number by the late Count d'Haussonville; some quite recently by the Countess de Pange. But these publications are unfortunately scattered. A chronological edition would do a great deal to "re-electrify" Madame de Staël and might even electrify the public. Somehow, at any rate, one has to invert the process of time: the morning after has to be made the evening before. One must destroy the printed word and listen to her voice: the print is sheer loss. Hers is, if anything, an oral art, into which one has to insert the missing half of the dialogue. To do this requires more than documentary evidence, though one cannot have too much of that, especially of the internal kind. The effort of reconstruction must, in the last instance, be a work of psychological imagination. To the curious, the game is well worth while. Intimacy grows in a subtle, unnoticed way until we find ourselves experiencing the privileged torments of her familiars,

PREFACE

trembling like Mathieu de Montmorency for her soul, with Benjamin, cursing her clinging temper, or paternally stroking her arm with Necker: *Pauvre Minette, avec l'esprit des siècles, tu es toute enfant par le caractère.*

Out of some such effort, gropingly conceived, arose the present volume, from a desire to instruct the author rather than the public. The Madame de Staël of the Empire will be dealt with in a second volume.

D. G. LARG.

Courmettes.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS

1766-1795

CHAP.	PAGE
I CHILDHOOD AND FORMATION OF CHARACTER	3
II THE JOURNAL, 1785	22
III FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS : DRAMA, 1786-1787	34
IV FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS : THE NOVELS, 1786-1787	54
V MADAME DE STAËL AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS	71
VI LETTERS ON THE CHARACTER AND WRITINGS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, 1788 .	80
VII THE STORM, 1789-1792	115
VIII THE STORM, 1792-1794	131

BOOK II

THE BALANCE-SHEET OF DISASTER A FRESH START

1795-1800

IX AFTER THE CATASTROPHE. EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE, 1794-1795 . . .	155
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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
X TENTATIVE ACTION. POLITICAL WRITINGS, 1794-1795	174
XI WINDING UP THE CRISIS. FIRST PHASE. THE INFLUENCE OF PASSION ON IN- DIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL HAPPINESS, 1795-1796	184
XII POLITICAL INTERVENTION. NEW AT- TEMPTS AT ACTION. A SCHEME FOR A CONSTITUTION, 1796-1799	223
XIII WINDING UP THE CRISIS. SECOND PHASE. HER WORK ON LITERATURE, 1799-1800	257
APPENDIX A: VERSE BY MADAME DE STAËL QUOTED IN THIS VOLUME	307
APPENDIX B: AUTHORITIES CONSULTED	312
APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL NOTES	315
INDEX	330

BOOK I

THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS
1766—1795

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND FORMATION OF CHARACTER

"It seems as if Madame de Staël was always young, but had never been a child," said Madame Necker de Saussure.

Among the numerous biographers of Necker's daughter, Madame Necker de Saussure is by no means the worst.

She began by disliking her cousin.

Then gradually learning to know her better, without ever slipping into a position of idolatry she acquired a solid respect for her talent.

But in learning to love her she did not cease to know her through and through. Her affection had a maternal element, in that it was constantly alive to the weaknesses as well as the charms of the loved one.

Could she have remoulded her cousin she would have arranged for less youthfulness and indiscreet impetuosity in the years of maturity, and for a more child-like childhood.

Her researches into the family annals have only produced one anecdote of little Germaine's childish days.

It seems that the child was always amusing herself by making kings and queens out of twisted paper. And these were tragedy-kings and queens taken from drama and not from life.

It is thought that this habit was the germ of a well-known trick of Madame de Staël's maturity of keeping a piece of twisted paper between her fingers, with which she constantly fidgetted, using it as a little switch or wand.

MADAME DE STAËL

And Madame Necker de Saussure would shew us from this illustration how childhood, youth and maturity were all merged into one.

Madame de Staël's other biographers have been quick to adopt this theory, so that if little has been written of Germaine Necker's childhood, it is because there was no childhood to write of.

It is easy enough to light on the moment when the girl becomes a woman, as mature a woman as she will ever be. But one can see far less of the earlier transitions.

From the very first we are to know her as a young girl who is no longer a child and looks as if she never had been one.

Upon the arrival of Mlle. Huber, who was to be a companion to her, Germaine, then aged about eleven (she was born on 22nd April, 1766), went into transports of joy.

She gave vent to her emotion in a discourse vibrating with eloquence, which made a very great impression upon her listener.

"She never played with me as a child would," writes Madame Rilliet-Huber, as Mlle. Huber afterwards became. "She began to enquire at once about the lessons I should give her; whether I could speak any foreign languages and whether I often went to the theatre. When I told her that I had only been to the theatre three or four times in my life she burst into an exclamation and promised me that we would often go together to the Comédie-Française, adding that when we came back we must write out a short account of the piece, noting any points which struck us . . . and that she was always accustomed to do that—and then—she added that we must write to each other every morning."

This is an unusual first interview with a child of eleven, and one can well believe that Madame Rilliet-Huber retained a permanent memory of its surprising quality.

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

She is certainly not a liar and her memory was a good one.

And as something to go on with, here is one characteristic of her childhood which Madame Necker de Saussure has not noticed. The two friends were to write to each other every morning.

This is a foreshadowing of the "*petite poste*" which was to divert the author of *l'Allemagne* in her leisure hours during her idyllic retreat at Fossé (summer 1810), which was also to perturb the clownish young squires of the neighbourhood when they came to pay their respects to the celebrated and persecuted lady of the manor.

The precocious child, however, was not the precursor of a woman of learning. No one has ever maintained, for instance, that Madame de Staël had an exceptional memory, or that she made use of it for the storing of her brain with knowledge outside the average grasp.

The contrary would be nearer the truth.

She was naïve in her admiration of the erudite Swiss historian, Jean de Muller, who, she assures us, cherished the six thousand years of the worlds' known history in a perfectly ordered sequence in his brain, side by side with a complete glossary of the names of the villages and notabilities of his native land.

Such a prodigy left her confounded: and with reason.

"To keep her attention fixed for a long time always wearied her, and from this, it is all the more surprising that she could have reached the heights she did reach.

"An extraordinary acuteness took her to her end by leaps and bounds. She accomplished without hard work." *

Nevertheless, Germaine's mother made serious efforts, during the first thirteen years of her daughter's life, to stabilize this too mercurial intelligence, by means of solid education.

* See Note. Appendix C: Additional Notes.

MADAME DE STAËL

“ I taught her languages,” she reminds her husband in a letter, “ and I took special care that she should speak her own with facility. I cultivated her intelligence and memory by reading the best books with her. I was her companion on her walks.”

It was her mother who provided her with the charming and intelligent girl from Geneva whom Germaine greeted so enthusiastically as her future companion and governess.

The only result of this apparently laudable zeal was that Germaine fell into low health, and was sent with Mlle. Huber to recruit at a country house of her father's at Saint-Ouen, where, by a liberal interpretation of the orders of the famous Doctor Trochin, the two girls dressed as nymphs and gave themselves up to the pleasures of rustic life.

It was at Saint-Ouen that the seeds were sown of Germaine's unbounded affection for her father, which was to endure to the end of her life ; for Necker himself found it advisable to retire from time to time to reinforce himself for his political cares, in a peaceful and patriarchal atmosphere on his country estates.

Madame Necker's system, which had not been so successful as that of the pastor of Crassier, was not taken up again.

In her opinion, to which she gave voice later, her daughter's education, brilliant as it may have appeared, was nothing like what her mother had desired for her or had received herself, and in point of fact, it is doubtful whether Madame de Staël was as well educated as her mother.

An element was now introduced into the plan of education even further from the theories of Jean Jacques than Madame Necker's had been ; and of which, it seems obvious, that lady did not foresee the immediate and lasting consequences.

Germaine was allowed to attend the conversational meetings, in her mother's drawing-room in the Rue de

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

Cléry, of that rear-guard of philosophers from whom Bonstetten was to receive a wretched impression of dwindled force.

According to Madame de Geniis, who had a great idea of herself as a pedagogue: "Good books and the solitude of her own room would have been better for the child."

What had been sown was duly reaped.

For a short time the future author of so many observations on the art of conversation, was content to keep silence, though her brilliant eyes betrayed the acuteness with which she took in every detail, and her silent lips seemed indeed to speak.

The next move was, by general consent, the formation of a circle round the stool where Germaine, by her mother's instruction, would sit in the most correct of attitudes.

The author of *L'Histoire des deux Indes* took her by the hands and "began to discuss things with her as if she had been five and twenty," seriously urging the brilliant child to produce an essay upon the Edict of Nantes.

This education in public brought in its train certain dangers which Madame Necker was not long in perceiving.

It was in vain that Germaine obeyed her mother's instructions to the letter, or took shelter behind her father, who never spoke, and listened even less; she was dragged out into publicity.

"They delighted in drawing her out, kissing her, and in exciting the little imagination, which was already aflame.

"The men of the most striking ability were those who were resolved to make her talk. They enquired into the extent of her reading, recommended new books to her and gave her genuine taste for study by conversing with her on every subject under the sun." *

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

Madame Necker, however, who knew a great deal about the personality of philosophers, and was always more or less mistrustful of them, was alarmed lest they should develop in her daughter an immoderate craving for the pleasure of the moment, for the distractions of society, and at the same time a vanity which, in principle at any rate, might easily result from the intellectual superiority which these philosophers and wits, entirely free from maternal solicitude, delighted to set in action.

Intellectual superiority apart, it was undeniably a bad thing for a young girl to become accustomed to a permanent court of men around her, even old ones ; to grow up believing that this was everyday life, that it was the natural thing for everyone to render her homage and to concern themselves with her to the exclusion of others.

How different it had been when her mother was a girl !

She had been through the discipline of poverty before she knew wealth.

Madame Necker could not see her daughter adopting the exacting airs of a great lady without anxiety, wishing for her the beneficent discipline of her own straitened girlhood.

This anxiety was certainly not unfounded.

The gallant Marmontel, once composer of couplets in honour of the mother, was now constructing very similar ones for the daughter.

"There was not a man who came to the house," said the Vicomte d'Haussonville, basing his authority on family documents from Coppet, "who did not pay homage to her under the various names of Louise, Milaine or Aglaé."

Guibert diverted himself in such time as he could spare from himself as a misunderstood hero, by writing allegorically in her honour with the same pen which had served him to celebrate the glory of the King of Prussia. For example :

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

"Zulmé is only twenty years old and she is a priestess of Apollo! She is the favourite of the divine one and he receives her incense with more favour than that of others.

"Her hymns are the most dear to the god.

"Among the throng of sacred girls came one. . . .
Can my heart ever forget the sight?

"Her great dark eyes were alight with genius.

"Her hair, black as ebony, fell round her shoulders in waving locks; her features were marked rather than delicate . . . in all her moving presence you could not but divine a coming destiny beyond that of her sex.

"Thus should we portray the Muse of Poetry, or Clio, or Melpomene!

"'There she is! There she is!' we cry when she appears, and our breath comes short and stifled!

"I gaze and I listen in transports.

"She has that which is more than beauty.

"What variety and play of expression in her face!

"What delicate modulations in her voice!

"What perfect harmony between thought and its utterance!

"She speaks! and if I do not catch her words, her inflexions, her gestures and her eyes convey all her meaning to me.

"She pauses! and her last words echo on in my heart, and I read in her eyes those words which are unspoken yet.

"She ceases! and the temple rings with applause!

"She bows her head in modesty; the long lashes creep down over those eyes of fire and thus the Sun is veiled! ——"

We shall meet this portrait again in fiction only slightly modified and coming from the pen of the girl to whom it was dedicated. It appears in her story of Zulma.

MADAME DE STAËL

In the meantime we cannot be surprised that Madame Necker (whose daughter recognised the real worth of this anxious thought for her future) believed it her duty to oppose this avalanche of flattery with the full weight of her authority, for authority she had, and she used it at this time against this incessant feeding of Germaine's vanity, to which she was prematurely exposed, ill-defended by a character which obviously had too little stability, though it could never be called a light one.

We find traces of the maternal preoccupation in letters exchanged at this period, between the mother and daughter.

Thus referring to a party of visitors at Saint-Ouen, whom Germaine believed to be there on her account, Madame Necker assures her daughter that "no one came specially to see you. They all went first to Saint-Denis, went on to the Duc de Gèvres and finished up with you *to see the garden.*"

Again and again in the mother's letters there are more or less evident allusions to the marked taste for society which Germaine betrayed, of which her mother begged her to disencumber herself before it was too late.

"I recommend you," she wrote on 15th May, 1779, "to give yourself up to all the rural tastes which make a sweet and simple thing of life. It is no waste of time to be building up one's health and forming the habit of appreciating simple joys at their true worth, which end by disgusting people with the display of town life, and remain within their reach under any conditions and at any age."

"You must make a habit," she repeats in the letter of 10th June already quoted, "of passing several days in succession in solitude and thoroughly well occupied. You know quite well that far from opposing any innocent pleasure of yours I encourage it in every way, and yet I am fully persuaded that when people arrive

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

at the point of being unable to do without pleasure they are no better than slaves, and what is more, incapable of doing anything great . . . or even, anything good."

The daughter was not very rebellious for she could not help appreciating the value of her mother's advice.

She reproached herself for her "frivolous ways," and tried to excuse her incessant relapses into the same faults.

She applied herself very conscientiously to her studies, made a careful commentary of the text of *L'Esprit des Lois* and read at the same time her father's *Comte-rendu* (1781), on which she was determined to congratulate the author solemnly, in an anonymous letter.

It is probable that Madame Necker felt less approval for the plays which Germaine wrote at this time and acted in the garden with Mlle. Huber.

But if these dramatic efforts were not of the type to please a compatriot of the author of *La Lettre sur les Spectacles*, we seem to feel that Germaine rendered her plays invulnerable to maternal criticism by incorporating in them all the moral precepts of her mother.

This is what we glean, at any rate, from a certain play described in the *Correspondance Littéraire* of September, 1778, which does not seem to have survived.

After a flattering preamble addressed to M. Necker, "whose decrees cover him with glory and will make France eternally proud of his administration," while his wife "gives evidence of her public spirit by founding an alms-house," Meister, who was then editing the *Correspondance* under the ægis of Madame d'Epinay, and was paid to have a good opinion of his patron and his family goes on to a eulogium of the daughter: "Their daughter, a child of twelve, who gives evidence

MADAME DE STAËL

of ability beyond her years, amuses herself by writing little plays.

"She has just produced one in two acts, entitled : *The Drawbacks of Life in Paris*, which is not only astonishing from a child of her age, but is better than those it is modelled on.

"The characters consist of a mother who has two daughters, one who was brought up to the 'simple life' in the country ; the other in all the ostentation and fever of the capital.

"The latter is the favourite daughter, thanks to her brains and her pretty engaging ways, but the mother, falling into misfortune through the loss of a law-suit, immediately discovers that it is the rustic maiden who chiefly deserves her tenderness and respect.

"The scenes of this little drama hang well together, the characters are well-sustained and the development of the plot is full of natural grace and interest."

Doubtless literary fashion of the moment largely accounted for the subject of this little play, concocted by Germaine as an anodyne for her mother.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau had died or committed suicide that very year (most people incline to the theory of suicide) and little Germaine had already vowed an ardent cult to the author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which was equally sincere (though ardent in a different fashion) as that which she vowed to Montesquieu.

The Drawbacks of Life in Paris might well be a juvenile expression of this veneration, but at the same time it is perfectly evident that a more intimate thought is interwoven in this background of literary suggestion, and that no other than the lesson incessantly inculcated by Madame Necker, that it is better and safer to prefer country life to town life.

We shall see later on, that this hypothesis is confirmed by examination of Madame de Staël's first literary works.

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

Penitence, however, which rushes into print, may be suspect from the maternal point of view, not only as being not very efficacious, but as tending to confirm in the penitent an inordinate preoccupation with self. Madame Necker might well suspect that the pleasure of literary composition was a driving force in the matter which more than equalled the desire to correct faults of character.

She therefore begged her daughter not to acquire a habit of lip-service, and on 11th June, 1779, she writes :

“ You are very clever at twisting all the silly things you have said to me so that they do not seem so bad. But a loving mother can see through all that and would much prefer a frank avowal to the subterfuges of self-love. However that may be, we will leave the past at that, and try to think that I may hope great things of you for the future ; and if you want me to believe in the genuineness of your exaggerated expressions of affection you have a simpler method at your disposal than all the French language can afford you. You have only to do in my absence all that my affection recommends you, for your moral and physical well-being.”

But the outcome of it all was that Madame Necker's influence was soon to become quite secondary, not so much on account of circumstances, as of the natural antagonism between the natures of mother and daughter.

An incident which appears in the family papers published by d'Haussonville, served to enlighten the mother as to the almost complete bankruptcy of her moral influence.

In 1784 she formed the idea of marrying her daughter to a young and brilliant Englishman, no other than William Pitt, whom the Neckers had met at Fontainebleau.

From Madame Necker's point of view it was the

MADAME DE STAËL

most desirable of marriages, since it had the double advantage of assuring the future of her daughter, who, as a Protestant, could not hope for an alliance with any of the great Catholic families of France, and at the same time of consolidating the political position of her husband by giving him a future Prime Minister of England as son-in-law.

Madame Necker could revel in contemplation of this delightful combination of advantages which was far from being indifferent to Necker himself.

It only remained to prepare the ground and to bring together the parties principally concerned in the most decorous manner possible.

But to the consternation of her mother, who had already built up a whole future of dreams upon this hypothetical basis, Germaine flatly refused, and displayed a tenacity of resistance which left her mother utterly defeated.*

It was a bad crisis, but the mother had to give way.

It affected her health, which was never robust, and believing herself dying she wrote a last letter to her daughter which was never delivered, because Madame Necker did not die after all, but it is most curiously expressed and shall be quoted :

"Yes," she writes with suppressed emotion, "you see me now on that verge which separates life from eternity—I stretch out one hand to life and one to eternity to attest both to the existence of God and to the happiness which comes from goodness alone.

"I wished you to marry Mr. Pitt. I wanted to confide you to a husband of great and noble character ; I wished also for a son-in-law to whom I could confide your poor father, one who would appreciate the worth of this legacy.

"You refused me these satisfactions. .

"But I pardon you if you will render the service which this marriage would have brought about.

* See Note. Appendix C.

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

"It is a great task. In this life my whole devotion has been for your father, for I look upon you as a part of him.

"You see, then, that you must take my place with him."

This last recommendation was fairly superfluous, and it must be looked upon as an indulgence in self-abnegation on the part of the invalid, who was only too much aware of the enthusiastic affection which bound the girl to her father and was shared to the same degree by him.

"Monsieur Necker," says the discreet Madame de Saussure, who glides as lightly as possible over this somewhat painful chapter in the family history, "was more struck every day by his daughter's ability," who, on her part, "would dare anything to obtain a smile from him." It was not long before a certain comradeship developed between them in which Madame Necker could not be included.

"Only the fear of losing the first place in her husband's affections," continues Madame de Saussure, "could have given a place to jealousy in Madame Necker's lofty soul. If her daughter had surpassed her in her own line, she could have associated herself with success due to her own teaching; she could have believed that it was herself that her husband loved in her daughter. But she could claim no credit to herself. Her daughter's pre-eminence seemed entirely due to nature. M. Necker absolutely delighted in her original intelligence, which had no model and no equal.

"Madame Necker was bound to feel vexation and impatience and her disapproval obscured from her the fact that it was the rivalry which galled."

Whatever attitude Madame Necker took up, it is clear that Germaine had passed into the moral guidance of her father for good and all, a guidance which had the advantage of being more indulgent and less hampering than his wife's.

MADAME DE STAËL

We should like to believe that Necker had a full sense of his paternal responsibilities and that he "was not prodigal in his admiration," and that he took as much notice of his daughter's bad qualities as of her good ones.

Madame de Staël was not wrong when she declared that there was in her father an "incredible acuteness" which enabled him to see his daughter exactly as she was and rendered dissimulation on her part absolutely unavailing.

But it was not difficult to read a soul as transparent as Madame de Staël's, and Ministers of State have not always much leisure to bestow on moral guidance in private life.

The truth was that the brilliant Germaine enchanted him, and all the more because of her unmeasured admiration of the paternal abilities, which she brought home to him on every possible occasion.

Here she was only following her mother's example, but doing it with her own inimitable wit and charm.

It would have been difficult for a man less vain than Necker not to betray his satisfaction at this homage, and not to repay it in kind.

The malicious De Feletz described at the beginning of the nineteenth century the ridiculous side of this family "mutual admiration society."

"Was it not indeed a singular spectacle," he says* "to see this family together: M. Necker always admiring Madame Necker; Madame Necker prostrated before M. Necker; M. Necker enchanted by Madame de Staël; Madame de Staël in ecstasies before M. Necker, and every one of them unrelaxing

** Jugements Historiques et Littéraires, 1840, p. 352. Madame de Staël's answer to de Feletz appears in Du Caractère de Madame Necker, p. 147: "In answer to this observation, which is flippant in the face of death, I shall only say: Yes, we are a family whose members praise one another. Yes, we love each other and felt a need of saying so, and disdaining ever to notice the attacks of our enemies, to use our abilities against them, we left them to beat against a rock of pride and lofty character, of which I alone am the sad but faithful survivor."*

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

in their efforts to implant in the souls of others the transports which held sway in her own, or in his own."

The picture is not much exaggerated.

The Necker family was not in this respect an ordinary family.

In thus admiring each other publicly the members of it seemed to have no suspicion that they might shock the susceptibilities of onlookers.

Madame de Staël's son-in-law, the Duc de Broglie, who was, for that matter, a great admirer of her talent, could not restrain himself from observing that Madame de Staël had done some injury to the memory of her illustrious father . . . by disposing a malicious and ungrateful public to speak of him as the Athenians spoke of Aristides.

Madame Necker's *Mélanges*, published under her husband's supervision, contains a "pen-portrait" of the benevolent editor, in which there is no parsimony in the use of laudatory adjectives.

But Germaine was able to go one better without offending the modesty of the head of the family.

Both portraits having been submitted to him, he refused to choose between them, but according to his daughter, "he admires my mother's very much but mine is the more flattering."

While admiring her father Germaine believed herself to resemble him.

A journal which she kept at this time contains the following reflection:

"Ah! certainly, though my character is much less like mother's than father's, I love her with a tenderness which might seem to be the warmest I am capable of, were it not that a stronger feeling does exist in me."

This is an opinion which she repeats more than once.

Later when she had become Madame de Staël and met Gibbon, her mother's old admirer at Coppet, she

MADAME DE STAËL

asks herself whether she, Madame de Staël, could have resulted from the union of those two.

"I answered in the negative, and that without my father *I* could never have come into the world."

In *Du Caractère de M. Necker* she writes: "I may be inferior to my father in every way, but there is a great and unmistakable likeness between us."*

She is quite sure of being her father's daughter.

And it leaks out in her biographical sketch of him, which she converted into a history of the French Revolution, that had she not been born his daughter she would have liked to be his wife.

"About twenty years elapsed," she writes, "between his arrival in Paris and his marriage, and during these years his work so absorbed him that he did not indulge in any of the pleasures of life.

"Sometimes when we were alone, he would talk to me of this period of his life, the thought of which touched me profoundly: those days, when I imagined him so young, so attractive and so much alone, those days in which our destinies might have been joined for ever had we been created as contemporaries."

Her father was, in her eyes, the very type of an ideal husband, a man whose high abilities did not overweight domestic affections.

On reaching her own maturity she never ceased to envy her mother this good fortune which she herself never enjoyed:

"She met the right man and spent her whole life with him. Peace be to her ashes. She deserved far more than I to be happy."

In the meanwhile she was acquiring early—one might almost say from the cradle—the habit of riches.

Where money was concerned she shewed nothing

*One might dispute this: If Madame de Saussure is to be believed, the mother must have transmitted to her daughter, with the blood, "an ardent soul, strong impressions, enthusiasm for everything great and beautiful, a keen taste for wit, for all talents and all distinction"—which is a great deal.

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

of the *parvenu*; her worst enemies have never reproached her with that.

But the opulence of the paternal mansion became translated into a sense of security in well-being which endowed the girl with two things, afterwards regretfully lost by the woman: a great and tranquil confidence in life, whose opening scenes had been so auspicious, and an innocent egoism made up principally from an imperative necessity for joy.

She learnt from it also to attach a certain importance to herself.

Necker was a great deal more than a financier. During the rapid formation of his daughter's character he was a very popular and much sought-after man, if not a great man.

Madame Necker's *salon* was not only the meeting-place of eloquent and disinterested philosophers, it was thronged with political parasites as well, whose equivocal smiles were not gauged at their real significance by the young Germaine.

On the day of Necker's dismissal, a green cockade (the colour of his livery) was worn in the streets of Paris, and two hundred thousand armed men had his name on their lips.

With regard to the parental ægis Madame de Staël exclaims later in life:

"Dear protection of the generation before us! Disinterested love! Love which always makes us feel that we are young, that we are loved, and that the world is still our own to do what we like with!"

Notice that during this early youth there is not a single love adventure.

In 1776, Germaine accompanied her father and mother to London.

This was to exchange the philosophers and wits of Paris for the philosophers and wits of London, among them, no doubt, Gibbon, and the Francophil, Horace Walpole.

MADAME DE STAËL

On her return to France she studies nature in the copses round her father's country-house at Saint-Ouen.

Later, in the spring of 1784, she spends a few months at Lausanne, at the Château of Beaulieu, where she makes the acquaintance of the smart young men of the town, receiving the same sort of notes that her mother had received twenty years before, and she throws herself into the gaieties natural to her age with more ardour than enjoyment.

At Coppet, towards the end of the same year, she remarks on the appearance of an enemy which she had already begun to dread : ennui.

She was not at this time quite a normal girl. She had become eccentric in her ways.

The balance bestowed by an active life was not there. She was consumed by a need for action which, finding no outlet, was driven inward, to gnaw at her.

Her nerves were on edge.

She had palpitations at the sight of celebrated personages ; she would burst into tears when anyone praised her parents.

One day, in 1782, Madame Necker took her daughter to call on Madame de Genlis, who read aloud to them something from her *répertoire*.

This is her report of the girl :

" Germaine," she says, " astonished me and did not please me. She cried a great deal, made loud exclamations as I read, incessantly kissed my hands, and is altogether a most embarrassing person."

Everyone was impressionable in those days and, God knows, Madame Necker, herself, did not lag behind in that direction.

But Germaine was hyper-sensitive.

Some of her letters touch the high-water mark of sheer nonsense.

" Yes, maman," she writes, " if I were to spend a thousand years gazing at you I should be jealous of

CHILDHOOD AND CHARACTER

one single moment when you turned away from me."

Her mother begged her "not to take leave of her senses."

But all in vain.

Madame Rilliet-Huber limits herself to the observation that her pupil was sometimes "unique, adorable," and sometimes "detestable."

In 1785 this disturbing young person was on the eve of marriage.

She amused herself by analysing herself. Instead of simply living, she exasperated her own sensibility by minute observation of it, and did it to such good purpose that she fell really ill.

She was in a high fever all through the month of November in that year.

The journal which she was keeping at this time, of which we only know a few fragments published by d'Haussonville in his *Salon de Madame Necker*, is an extremely interesting document even in its fragmentary condition.

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNAL, 1785

SHE does not keep the diary in order to record the little events of daily life, and there is very little mention of nature.

She does confer "an honourable mention" on a sunset, having cast a vague and abstracted glance at it while strolling in the park at Saint-Ouen with her father.

No doubt there were weightier matters to be discussed between them.

Then a "fearful storm," with thunder and torrents of rain, reminds her that the tempests of the human soul are reverberated and prolonged in that sympathetic Nature "which was made for man."

She is completely absorbed by one agonizing problem, the Necker family . . . which includes Germaine and her destiny.

One word from her mother sufficed to set all this anguish in motion, a word which she let fall, no doubt, when feeling more ill than usual and a prey to melancholy, a word which suddenly revealed to Germaine a possibility, the bare suggestion of which froze her blood, the possibility that the Necker family might soon be broken up by the death of one of its members.

This idea of the imminence of death took possession of her morbid imagination; she returns again and again to the contemplation of it, passes from resignation to terror, is even afraid to go to sleep, because sleep closely resembles inexorable death in her imagination.

She writes in the journal :

“What an image of disgust and terror death in general evokes. The idea of one’s own death does not make quite that impression. Consoling hope and tender regret are aroused by that thought because it is difficult to realize annihilation for oneself, and one’s soul frees itself in advance from the body which Time will destroy.

“But the death of a person one loves !

“Oh, God ! If these ideas are so dark to one’s mind, what would they be to one’s heart !

“Think of being forced to see the ministers of death lay hands on the beloved !

“To the music of funereal hymns they would snatch away all that is left, the dear body that one would struggle to revive with the force of one’s despairing cries. The tolling bell would swing in time to the rhythm of feet moving to the tomb-side ; and then silence . . . still more awful silence would tell the terrible truth that all was gone for ever.”

One can easily follow the whole small brain-storm in action as it took place. The vague general conception of death is exchanged for a realistic nightmare that is almost hallucination, and almost involuntary.

Sensibility and imagination are accomplices : one acts upon the other, and a vicious circle is set up which keeps her in a state of perpetual excitement—unhealthy excitement.

One can well understand that this girl came to fear solitude, and at all hazards sought out the special atmosphere which set her radiant, sparkling gaiety in full play ; amused herself by amusing her father and by making Mlle. Huber laugh or cry ; and went constantly to balls.

For some people, any road will serve if it takes them away from themselves.

But the tête-à-tête which she dreaded was bound to return at intervals.

MADAME DE STAËL

She had to be alone in the night, and when she woke in the mornings; and it is worth remarking upon that it was at these moments that the diary was written.

It was not a case of plaintive and elegiac melancholy like Madame Necker's.

In the daughter's case sensibility always became converted into feverish energy which only assumed the form of melancholy when Germaine was condemned to inaction; but all through life, with her, it was a sort of "possession," and completely mastered all her faculties which she used as instruments for agitating herself when they could not find any legitimate vent.

There is also a deliberate intention in the journal of putting herself to the test.

This insistence on the idea of death is partly voluntary.

Indeed, for anyone who is dominated by an unruly nervous system, the only method of finding deliverance is to exhaust it. It was partly in order to master her *idée fixe* that Germaine abandoned herself to its power.

She challenges this haunting image of death, evokes it in its most repugnant details, plans out a painful future which will have to be cut short by suicide, not because she thinks for a moment that her future will be like this, still less because she really proposes to take her own life, but in order to have done with fear by its absolute exhaustion.

She does not lack courage, the courage which, as she says, is rooted in her sensibility, which, when all is said and done, is moral courage.

Of physical courage she never had very much.

Her moral courage and impetuous idealism were allied to a feminine timidity, the timidity which is in generalisation associated with her sex, and this was naturally accentuated by the entirely sheltered conditions of her life as a young girl.

She had, besides a decided appetite for pleasure, something of the epicureanism which hung in the very atmosphere she breathed, which her youthfulness had naturally absorbed.

All this could not but result in a sort of internal warfare, a state of perilous moral equilibrium most disturbing to anyone who was intellectually aware of it.

She feels that her being is divided, and that this was owing to the exaggerated sensibility which permeated every fibre of her, to her torment as well as to her joy.

The more conscious she becomes of this interior duality, of this extraordinary combination of strength and weakness which is within her, the more she struggles to compensate for the disparity in such a way as to liberate her energies for action.

She tries to use her strength to conquer her weakness, to annihilate the latter and thus to bring into the domain of the conscious, the deeply and vexatiously instinctive movements of the soul, to which she so often fell a victim.

A writer's art doubles his being. It creates a society of two. He is no longer alone.

But for anyone with Germaine's imagination it also provokes crises and exaggerates their magnitude.

The exaggeration is so excessive that you may well believe you are reading a romance in the journal.

She has no sooner taken up her pen to describe one feeling, which may well be genuine and move her deeply, before this feeling suggests another feeling, less intimately part of her, but born in her mind, connected with a link to the first feeling, mentally appreciated by her, and therefore, she believes also, deeply felt.

Sensibility glides on, leaving an oily trail, and the reader is soon incapable of distinguishing between the feelings that Germaine had, and the feelings that she thought she had.

MADAME DE STAËL

The young author springs from rung to rung of her ladder of neat phrases, and the confession ends by being an exercise in rhetoric, an exercise which is constantly interrupted by abrupt plunges into reality.

She really does not know what her own aim is : to confess, to make amends, or to practise the literary art ?

Her excuse is, that she is incapable of deciding where reality ends and where fiction begins : what she has read *lives* in her, and reality is, for her, always veiled in a haze of distance which makes it unreal.

The impression received is, none the less, a bad one.

The journal is so much like poor fiction, that one is much tempted to go one's way disbelieving in it.

Any faith that we may put in it is the faith of indulgence.

We read Germaine for the sake of Madame de Staël. And one cannot avoid an uneasy feeling.

This is not the work of a young soul—at any rate the soul is not young enough : it has the false air of borrowed maturity.

Why does not this child tell us simply and naïvely what she has in her heart ?

She serves up a hash of Prévost and Jean-Jacques. As for talent, there is not much to be discovered unless one brings a fair amount of good will to the task.

Those ministers of the dead ! Funereal chants ! Tolling bells ! What are they but the most commonplace elements of melodrama ?

The methods of literary expression, too, seem very poor, when they should at all costs have a certain originality in order to bolster up the writer's sincerity.

Here and there an image starts to light which is as battered and insignificant as an old scarecrow which has done duty in a field for a long time.

And yet . . . character illuminates the whole !

The vague miscellaneous style is the same old hack mounted by every quill-driver of the eighteenth

century, but already one is forced to see that this rider is a dashing one!

She rides so fast that she will ride her mount to death.

The page is thick with exclamation marks ; thought is a racing torrent, though not a deep one, and surely the heart gallops too.

How clearly one can see her flinging herself upon the pen, and writing as if in one continuous lightning-streak until she has reached the conclusion of her thought ; then see her go off without an instant's pause to ask herself whether she has expressed precisely what she had to say, and to assure herself that her phrasing is satisfactory.

But Germaine is not always looking within. She has more mundane visions than those of malady and death.

In a more careful style, making use of calculated subtleties, she attempts the pen-portraits then so much in vogue, in her journal.

Even if we did not possess her numerous portraits of her father, that of her friend, Madame de Beauvau, in her journal, would enlighten us as to her own idea of her task as a moralist.

We are told that "Madame de Beauvau had a simple nature, a very reasonable intelligence, facility rather than real grasp, the presence and manners of a great lady ; but in this she seems only to shew herself as she naturally is, and fails to see others as they are ; consequently she has just the same manner for all classes ; I do not mean the same mode of address, for that would mean a stupid confounding of people she was dealing with."

In juxtaposition with this precious bit of affectation we must place one of those essays in synonyms, a society whim which had been made the fashion by a book by Abbé Roubaud.

Immediately after her marriage Germaine sent off

MADAME DE STAËL

to the faithful Meister the manuscript in which she has dissected herself into four in order to demonstrate in what manner a *feature* differs from an *excrecence*, and the *truth* from *candour*.

She deals with Madame de Beauvau by the same method and the following verdict is delivered on the delicate subject as to whether or not she loves her husband :

“ There are women who love their husbands more than she does, but then these women announce that they love them more than they really do, and as the amount added on to their genuine love cannot be calculated, though loving more, they really love less than Madame de Beauvau ! ”

This kind of subtlety is obviously and absurdly *fin-de-siècle* ; and we permit ourselves to doubt whether it sheds any light on the character or anything else.

There is a total absence of malice in the portrayer, but in any case, Madame de Beauvau only serves as a spring-board for a young and agile intelligence which absolutely needs to bound about ; and needs also to put out feelers.

The search is pushed home, so to speak.

Germaine analyses Madame de Beauvau in comparison with herself.

Thus she arrives at the conclusion that this lady is not so intelligent as herself : it is not expressed in so many words, but it is easily understood.

It is noted that though Madame de Beauvau is “ no fool in character-reading,” she is “ not sufficiently alive to the ridiculous side of things.”

That, of course, “ puts everyone at ease with her.”

Her sensitiveness “ is not ardent, not deep, but it exists, is genuine, lasting and of good quality.”

Finally—her mind itself leaves something to be desired.

Kind, sensitive, intelligent and good, yet Madame

de Beauvau gives evidence of a tendency "to discuss cookery and housekeeping," instead of resting from those subjects when she can, by taking refuge in "the pleasures of eloquence and gaiety," instead of "soaring like a goddess from height to height."

We do not say that Germaine is not stating a truth here.

She was never malicious, but she was full of mischief.

One feels that if she had let herself go without compunction in this vein she could have portrayed Madame de Beauvau so well that she would have emerged "in the round."

In conversation she would fling these portraits about by the handful, portraits which only lived in the memories of those who heard her talk.

It is a great pity that they had no more durable form, for to-day one would give much (some people would give half of her serious work) to obtain a complete collection of the "good things" she flashed off in conversation.

If we are to believe internal evidence, this journal was meant to reach other eyes but her own. It was not her fault if no one else saw it.

She counts on one reader at least—her father.

The better to fire his curiosity, she writes an epigraph from his own works on the first page, and beneath that:

"Turn the page, Papa, if you dare, after having read this epigraph. Ah! you have so secure a place in my heart that you ought not to envy me this one little intimacy with myself that I keep to myself."

It was a very feminine ruse.

After that she had only to make use of her usual untidiness, leave the mysterious note-book flapping open on the arm of a chair, and to wait until the methodical Necker came to pick it up with a view to putting it away.

MADAME DE STAËL

He might have read curious things in it, which concerned him closely.

For one thing, his daughter comments on the religious work that he is writing.

But above all he should have dwelt on the passage treating of the grave question which was giving rise to much debate in himself, the question of his own future.

He was out of office. Should he remain in retirement at Coppet, or shoulder his way to the front of public affairs again?

"A fine sort of retirement for my father—a desert in a republic, after having served a King! What a position for a proud heart! How *splendid* it would be if he were sent for and begged to take the reins of the French Government again!

"Then he could accept or refuse at his own good pleasure.

"As for myself . . . well . . . I fret over it a great deal. I am mortally afraid that he might choose to spend the whole of his life on his estates here!

"Oh! may he forgive me . . . but I shudder to think what it would be like if the door was shut for ever upon us three!"

It is quite clear what the daughter wants. She wants to live.

She urges her father to win renown instead of shutting himself up with his invalid wife.

She debates the problem for a whole page, or rather she produces upon paper the pros and cons of a discussion which is, for her, already closed.

Sometimes she speaks for her father and sometimes she expresses her own point of view with extreme precision.

The alternations are quite amusing.

She calls her case: "Putting myself in the place of another."

The fact is, that it is much more like lifting the

existences of other people bodily into that of her own, and primarily that of her father.

To bring matters to a point, this instinctive habit was the cause of the semi-rupture between Madame Necker and her daughter.

The mother refused absorption on principle and through native obstinacy ; the father succumbed.

Germaine's natural force, the impetuous movement of her being, separated the husband and the wife, the one all admiration of her power, the other deeply deploring her failings.

But this egoism was absolutely unconscious and instinctive.

Instead of trying to hide, it comes boldly into the open.

Just read a certain passage in which the sophisticated young person imagines herself attacked by small-pox, and on the point of death.

"You would be obliged to deny yourself the company of those you love best, deny yourself the only fascination of death, that of bestowing a last proof of tenderness, which makes this fatal moment so solemn and so touching.

"You could not even speak to them in this last moment, when every word rings out as a great truth.

"That last moment of the dying surely unites in one all the sensations of joy, fruition, and possession to be felt in a lifetime."

It is a singular subject, but her attitude is still more so.

"Also I loathe this accursed sickness because it disfigures. Distorted by the disease, your face could no longer express your thought.

"Your dimmed eyes would be unable to see the most beloved face in order to revive their failing light from it.

"You could not distinguish the last tender looks bent upon you in the death agony.

MADAME DE STAËL

“When words had failed, you could no longer make your eyes speak for you. You could not draw down upon your heart the hand of the adored one, to make its dying flutter felt.”*

This is the death of a *Julie*, in the limelight, in the middle of a stage.

She believes that in this fashion she is giving her whole self. But her pity for the supposed mourners round her death-bed is really pity for herself.

She is deluding herself.

She thinks she is submitting, but instead of that, she is dominating.

And domination is for her something quite delicious, a unique delight.

In any case, the form of this confession displays her inalienable bent for society.

And that, no doubt, is one of the reasons why the journal was not kept up.

Germaine never kept it for very long ; at most during the months of July and August, 1785, and even then, it was only kept in irregular fashion.

It was only kept for the want of something better to do.

She abandoned it as soon as marriage gave her more scope in every way.

As years passed on and the whirlpool of life left her no respite (not that she would have done anything but loathe a respite), she never resumed the keeping of a journal.

Her so-called Memoirs are quite a different matter ; it is work created by circumstance quite as much as by herself.

For the moment life calls her.

She is determined to make her first appearance at the side of a father before whom the whole of France lies prostrate.

At the same time she must have a husband ; a man to give her his name and to rescue her from virginal seclusion.

* See Note. Appendix C.

She is no longer very exacting about the personal nature of the candidate.

So, in order to shake herself free from home restraint, in order to step out boldly into the future, she gave her consent to marriage with a Swedish baron, who is no other than Madame de Boufflers' "little de Staël."

CHAPTER III

FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS : DRAMA 1786-1787

GERMAINE was married on 14th January, 1786, and thus became Swedish Ambassadors in Paris.

In the month of June, 1787, she gave birth to a daughter, who did not long survive.*

The fact of her pregnancy prevented her from taking full advantage of the whirl of pleasure into which she might otherwise have plunged at will.

Still imperfectly emancipated from the habits of the Necker family, and taking comparatively little interest in her husband, she fell upon her pen and began to write plays and novels as a means of occupying the time on her hands. It is almost certain that the three novels : *Histoire de Pauline*, *Mirza*, and *Adélaïde et Théodore*, which first appeared in her *Recueil de Morceaux Détachés* (1795), were composed at about this time, immediately after her marriage.

Madame de Staël assures us airily that they were all written before she was twenty (see Preface, edition 1795), and before the French Revolution burst upon the world, which proves nothing, because at the beginning of the French Revolution she was twenty-three.

Let us attempt to deal with such facts as we can get hold of.

* For the date of this child's birth consult Geffroy's *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, Vol. II., page 444. In a letter of 29th May, 1787, Madame de Staël refers to "the child which I am soon to bring into the world." In another letter of June, 1787, she speaks of her daughter.

It will be shewn that *Mirza* must have been written in 1786. *Adélaïde et Théodore*, as the most ambitious of the series, probably came last.

The *Histoire de Pauline*, which shews more striking ability than the other two, was probably conceived in 1785.

But these three stories all deal with the question of marriage, to which Madame de Staël gave serious consideration as a subject of urgent importance until, two years after her own marriage, in 1788, she gave it up as a bad job.

The same subject forms the basis of two plays printed in her *Œuvres* of 1820, bearing the dates of 1786 and 1787.

The first of these dates belongs to *Sophie ou les Sentiments Secrets*, and the second to *Jane Grey*.

This is just what we should have expected. In *Sophie* we can easily trace the hand of an unmarried girl. It has artlessness, both in construction and idea.

Jane Grey betrays a firmer hand, a warmer temperament.

Madame de Staël also wrote an historic tragedy during her youth, called *Montmorency*; but this most probably belongs to the year 1790, and the manuscript remained buried in the tower of the archives at Coppet.

If we except the *Synonymes* sent to Meister, and a little story called *Folle de la Forêt de Senart*, produced by the fashion for madness, which followed the fashion for synonyms, we shall have the sum total of the apprentice-works, making every possible allowance for error, and for the discoveries which future research may bring to light.

All these are grouped round the moral crisis of marriage, accomplished or seen in perspective.

Strange to relate, in spite of the intimate nature of the source of her works, Madame de Staël was always ready to read them aloud.

MADAME DE STAËL

If we may believe Madame de Saussure, the young reader "had incredible success."

Her critics had fallen in with the family custom.

The tragedy-kings and queens did not fail to found a family.

Saint-Beuve remarks that Madame de Staël had her marionettes, just as Goethe had his, but those of Madame de Staël were not able to "put on immortality."

As we know, Germaine, the child, had proceeded from making paper puppets to the creation of puppets in drama, with the collaboration of Mlle. Huber, and had presented them either to an imaginary audience or to an equally indulgent audience consisting of her family.

Then came real visits to a real theatre with her parents; serious discussion of the plays she witnessed, in which Marmontel, Grimm, and Voltaire's "monkey," Laharpe, all participated.

Mlle. Clairon herself, a little faded, but still a stately figure, used to return the Necker's hospitality by declaiming pieces from her *répertoire* after supper.

But beyond all this, the theatre was Germaine's blissful short-cut to life.

It was better than life. It was life with the boredom left out: life with its pace accelerated . . . in fact . . . the ideal life. It was life reduced to the terms of a moral problem, it was emotion staged in a lovely setting, where it might blossom to an exquisite completion.

It was a continuation of that existence of the *salons*, which was the only one she knew, but made finer.

In the first place emotion was more concentrated, more poignant, the play of mind rapid and held well in hand; and enveloping the whole, was there not that delightful unique sensation of luxury and refinement which was all the more entrancing because it was fictitious and fleeting?

Long before she knew the delight of being the most popular hostess in Paris, she had carried all her unsatisfied curiosity to the theatre.

Later, the theatre was to be her refuge from importunate reality, from the sad necessity of being bored. But it helped the young girl to embrace the life she longed for; to which she already stretched out with all her avid senses.

It seems, however, that it was some time before Madame de Staël perceived how little talent she possessed for the dramatic art.

Madame Necker de Saussure speaks of "very imperfect sketches which were never to get into print."

But these sketches certainly were printed, and that not owing to editorial inadvertence, but by order of Madame de Staël herself in 1790.*

In January, 1791, she gave a reading of them at the house of Cazenove d'Arlens, at Lausanne. At that time she was so far from recanting the follies of her youth that she commissioned Rosalie de Constant to set the lyric in *Sophie* to music, a commission willingly accepted.

The rather affected utterances in the preface of 1790 should not be taken too seriously.

She makes a disdainful face at her own *Sophie*, evidently placing *Jane Grey* on a higher level.

She says that she has decided to print *Sophie* in its original form in spite of the faults in style; first because she only means to let friends see it; and secondly because "to go back on one's thoughts, to alter the expression of emotion in cold blood, is such a painful task that effort must necessarily shew through any success in it," and there is no denying that this is good reasoning.

* We have not seen the edition of 1790. The preface of it is reproduced in Vol. 17 of the *Oeuvres*, with the text of *Sophie* and *Jane Grey*. It was evidently limited to very few copies. The *Manuel Bibliographique* by M. G. Lanson also mentions an edition of *Sophie* dated 1786.

MADAME DE STAËL

In dealing with *Jane Grey* she does not feel the need of so much excuse.

The preface opens seriously with a few observations on the use of historical subjects which are, by the way, in perfect agreement with observations on the same subject towards the end of her career.

"I prefer historical subjects to pure fiction. Names illustrated by our memories capture interest in advance; probability cannot be questioned when one works from the truth; and imagination, instead of leading thought astray, recreates real experience of the past, and holds up the great lessons of that past to contemporaries."

She believes that, as far as she is concerned, "historical events have been exactly followed in the tragedy of *Jane Grey*" (*she* does not dream of calling it a mere sketch), and though she has relied on Rowe for her conception of the character of Pembroke, she has borrowed nothing else in her treatment of the subject from the English author.

This seems to indicate that Madame de Staël retained the illusions proper to a literary novice for at least four or five years.

In addition to this, if we take *Jane Grey* alone, there are two thousand lines in verse, which is perhaps not an overwhelming amount, but it is a great deal for Madame de Staël, who did not compose more verse than that, during the whole of the rest of her life.

The verses are bad, and that is all that need be said of them.

But Germaine's diary has already made known to us her literary method.

We are prepared for the use of the first adequate word that comes to her; we know how repugnant it is to her impatient character to revise her work when it is simply a case of writing tolerable prose.

The inevitable conclusion we come to is, that she

must have made considerable efforts in composing *Sophie* and *Jane Grey*.

Nor need we be astonished at it.

These compositions are the fruits of natural ambition, which, at a given moment, had a certain intensity.

Youth always begins with high aims.

Madame de Staël wanted "to leap from height to height."

French tragedy offered a form for the full realization of her ideal; the literary realization of it, a picture without shadows, where all the contours were noble and clearly defined.

Although *Sophie* is not called a tragedy, and has only three acts, the play is none the less enwrapped in a brooding atmosphere of classical abstraction.

If by any chance you expect from it an example of the *bourgeois* drama of pre-Revolution days, you would be undeceived by a glance at the list of characters.

Necker's daughter did not belong to the school of Sebastian Mercier.

The action takes place between the Comte de Sainville; his wife; Miss Sophie Mortimer, born, it is true, in the land of melodrama, but of good family and blameless reputation; and Lord Henry Bedford.

There is also a footman who "blows in" half-way through the play as a bearer of love-letters.

He is not mentioned in the cast.

It is a Society piece.

To avoid any misconception on that point, the castle is "seen in the distance," and the action all takes place in the idyllic setting of an English garden, between a funeral urn near a cypress tree on one side, and a closed summer-house on the other.

Nothing is to be seen of the outside world but a small glimpse of the high road, through the iron scroll-work of a manorial gate.

Jane Grey is still more classical.

MADAME DE STAËL

It is, in the author's intention at any rate, a great tragedy in five acts.

It is bad tragedy, but such as it is, it lives. It is complete: the unity of place is rather disturbed in the last two acts, but Voltaire has been guilty of that; on the other hand, that she may not offend against the unity of time, Madame de Staël has cut Rowe's play into two pieces (she only really makes use of the second half) and compresses the nine days of the unhappy Jane's brief reign into a period, of which the duration is not precisely stated, but may pass, at need, as not exceeding the recognised limit.

At the same time the scenes only limp along, and no one would maintain that there is unity of style.

Without losing our sense of proportion, we may say that it is an example of cause and effect.

The Court of Louis XIV. produced the genius of Racine for tragedy.

The park at Saint-Ouen and the *salon* in the rue de Cléry produced the idealising imitations of young Madame de Staël.

She has no fear.

She marches into the temples of art, just as she marches straight on into life.

In 1789, in her *Eloge of Guibert*, she lets the public into the secret, the inmost secret of tragedy:

"The writer who can *move* the public holds the real secret of the tragic art: *the rest can be acquired.*"

Madame Necker did not approve of *Sophie*, but she kept her reasons for disapproval to herself.

It is the story of a guardian, a married man, and a father, who falls in love with his girl-ward and nobly hides his love, while she on her side is entirely ignorant of the ravages his passion is producing, and cannot account for the mysterious melancholy which is consuming herself.

Stage guardians in love with girl-wards had begun

in the latter half of the eighteenth century to lose their ridiculous and fractious character, and were sharing the ascending fortunes of another type, up to then usually butts in comedy, the legion of poor tutors to girls of good family.

Taken as a morality, there is nothing in *Sophie* which does not conform absolutely with the "Test of Virtue" model, which bred with incredible rapidity, both in drama and romance of the period, in which virtue, on condition of giving this term all the elasticity which it was then endowed with, was always more or less indemnified.

In *Sophie* virtue is triumphant.

It was not merely the greater or less proportion of morality in the play which disturbed Madame Necker.

The story seemed to her to brush very close to certain secret feelings and states of mind in the Necker family, and though not identical, had a resemblance to the conditions which had resulted in an uncomfortable and unacknowledged antagonism between herself and her daughter.

Germaine, we must understand, had not given way to embellishing her artless plot with the ordinary trappings of romance.

The Count, who loves Sophie passionately, keeps a bust of her in the mysterious summer-house of which he alone holds the key.

As he cannot openly adore Sophie, he adores her bust.

Sophie, who manages to get access to the summer-house, finds her bust there, and is suddenly enlightened as to the whole situation.

As she does not secure the door when she leaves the summer-house, the Countess also discovers its secret.

This leads up to the final crisis.

Everybody makes a clean breast of it.

The only struggle in the case is as to which of them shall be the most self-sacrificing.

MADAME DE STAËL

The only obstacle to getting out of the difficulty is the immeasurable generosity of everybody.

Finally the Count cuts the Gordian knot by insisting on sacrificing himself.

His sacrifice is to accept Sophie's sacrifice, for the girl leaves his home, laden with this aggravated burden of her miseries.

Failing the bust and an anonymous letter which falls conveniently from the clouds at the right moment, nothing would ever have been cleared up, and all three characters, Sophie, the Count and the Countess, must inevitably have been consumed to ashes by their silent passions.

The action we may see is without plan or construction, but it is stiffened by the thesis, which is the sanctity of marriage.

The parts played by the husband and wife are ambiguous.

At first, by their separation, they form points of the world-old stage triangle, which confronts the Countess with a younger rival.

And afterwards in their reunion they become the defenders of, and even the apologists for, an institution which has nearly suffered catastrophe at their hands.

THE COUNT (*to Sophie*)*

“ Believe me, that your joy's so much my care,
That I'll not spare myself to bring it you :
That joy that worthy mating brings a maid.
I'll bind your marriage-knot with ties of love.
God ! How I know the value of such fate !
Oh ! happy those whom Fate has led along
Two paths that meet and bring them face to face,
That glorying both in Love Invincible,
That draught they both shall drink without
remorse,

* The originals of all the verses quoted in this volume appear in Appendix A.

And taste Love's sharpest bliss in innocence !
 Spring wreathes *their* future with green leaves of
 hope,
 For when our years begin to flee away
 And take with them our youth's desire of life,
 And Time leads swiftly to eternal Night,
 What joy is left ? Oh, happy mortal then,
 Who has and holds his dearest wish for ever !
 For him Life shews a separate face, and Time ;
 His days go by like days of mated doves,
 And all his future holds his present hours,
 When every passing moment bears a joy.
 Ah ! from the chain of days that makes his year,
 Another's destiny might snatch but one,
 And wear it as a jewel it cannot match.
 If this is true for man, how far more true
 It must be, then, for woman. You are free !
 Therefore may hope for this, and may not dare
 To fling such fate away"

SOPHIE :

" Yes. There lies happiness !

Oh ! words my very heart's core echoes back !

I do adore them . . . know them for the truth."

It is not by chance that these lines rise somewhat
 above the general mediocrity of the rest.

The measure is firmer and they breathe inward
 conviction.

The same note rings out later on where the Countess
 lifts up her voice after the Count in praise of the
 married state.

THE COUNTESS :

" How rarely, Sophie, youth can truly weigh

The blessedness of happy ties in life !

Yet one day you may know the bitterness

Of pining in a loveless solitude,

MADAME DE STAËL

Of wandering unheeded through the world
Not the first care of any human heart !
Once man has suffered this, sure that his pain
Will draw no tears from any mortal eyes,
How reckless must he be of his own end !
Unlov'd, uncherished ! Who can love himself ?
Then one behind the other, lifeless days
Tread on each other's heels and pass away !
Ah ! Sophie ! Never trick yourself to think
That joy is sown after youth flies away.
Joy's fountain in our age springs from the past !
We were uncherished but for those we've loved.
And only by the planting of our youth,
We pluck the flowers of love through all our years.
That heart we won *in youth* is still our own
By memories which blossom as new joys."

The object of all this in the piece is to bring the mournful Sophie to put an end to her misfortunes by marrying Lord Henry Bedford, who has hovered about through three acts as Sophie's attentive shadow.

In principle Sophie cordially endorses all the praise bestowed on marriage by her guardian and his wife.

One would say that Germaine was preaching herself a little sermon.

Marriage, she reiterates, is a sacred and beneficent institution, which women especially should uphold.

But in the play Sophie does not marry Lord Henry. She simply goes away.

Which means that between love and loveless marriage, she chooses love, even unhappy love, without troubling herself to reconcile the principles she accepts with the action she performs.

Sophie, we therefore feel, must be one of those little persons who believe that principles have no place in private life.

There is no mistaking the gist of the play.

Though they are all made "platitudinarians," the three characters are unmistakably portraits, smudged and sketchy enough, but still portraits of the three members of the Necker family.

No doubt the portraiture is involuntary, but it is none the less interesting to discover it there. We must all use the materials we have, and at the time of writing *Sophie*, Germaine had no real psychological knowledge of anybody but her father and mother.

It is just the contrary of the method of procedure in her journal; there, fiction was mixed with reality; here, reality strikes through the fiction and you get more of the truth than you expect.

Without being able to explain the precise reason of it, *Sophie* strikes you as the most important character.

No one ever tells her to "run away and play."

On the contrary, the elders treat her with an exceptionally courteous deference, even their remonstrances are framed with respectful consideration.

Sophie has "enchanting eyes," which accords with the fact that Germaine's eyes were her greatest beauty.

She is the subject of the Count's secret pre-occupation; he does not love her with a playful elderly affection, but with passion, as if she were a contemporary of his.

It is also indicated that *Sophie's* charms act upon a wider circle than that shewn to us. She is declared to be the despair of numerous suitors, of whom Lord Henry Bedford is given us as a specimen.

Everyone in the play is full of melancholy and sensibility, but in these regions *Sophie* outshines them all.

Her melancholy is blacker, her sensibility is more vibrating and impetuous.

And though a curious mixture, she is a charming creature, more natural, more spontaneous than the other characters.

MADAME DE STAËL

She has never been really a child, and in compensation she seems to have preserved more of the freshness and artlessness of childhood than other young girls.

It is a matter of education and temperament.

We will quote once more.

“The sad and solitary life she led
In childhood, bit like acid on her mind.
From her first years she lost all child’s belief
In happiness. Perhaps her heart was stirred
Too early and too keenly for its good.
She suffered . . . but therefrom she blossomed more
Into a sweet inimitable grace.
So in the bloom of early spring she kept
Still the white candour of the bursting bud ;
And the up-growing of this purity
Told of the power of nature in her soul.”

In the case of the Countess, sensibility is well shepherded by reason.

Let us suppose the maternal admonitions of Madame Necker incorporated as the qualities of a good and charming woman and we get the Comtesse de Sainval, who, from being “a simple fragile child,” has become a most amiable and devoted woman, who is neglected. She has already plaintively described the state of desertion upon earth :

“ . . . wandering unheeded through the world.”

The invalid Madame Necker often adopted that tone.

But the author insists more upon the good qualities than the defects of this character.

Beneath the austerity which the Countess affects because she has been taught “to keep a constant guard upon herself, for excess of tenderness only repels,” a mother’s heart is hidden, which does not cease to be a mother’s heart, even when it is submitted to rude shocks.

THE COUNTESS :

“ Believe me, more than ever you are dear !

Your rival has a mother’s heart for you.”

The mutual admiration of the two women has its explanation in the lofty virtues of the Count, who is far from being anybody or nobody. He is a “ very gentil parfitte knight,” quite as much annoyed as anyone else that he has failed to love his wife as he ought to love her, and generally comporting himself in a difficult situation with all the delicacy expected of a man of irreproachable honour. But that is not all.

We are shewn very little of him in the aspect of unfaithful husband ; rather one is made to look upon him as a man who resists temptation without appearing to wish to succumb.

An important point to note is that Sainval is a great man, and recognised as such.

He is full of maxims, and his great sagacity has been applauded beyond the frontiers of his own country.

One of the proudest scions of an English house, Rossel (presumably Pitt), would not have felt that he was stooping in allying himself with so distinguished a Frenchman.

As Sophie and the Countess are both prevented from doing justice aloud to their idol, the former in her character of *ingénue* unconscious of her love, the latter on account of her Britannic principles, the amiable Bedford always “ out of office,” and no doubt delighted to have something to say, bursts out into sonorous panegyric :

“ Oh ! you whom all are forced to love with ardour,
For whom cold Reason’s self lights up with fire,
Whose happy diverse gifts where’er you rule,
Bind France with England, one in praise of you !
A man whose nature cannot lay him low !
Restrained in love, nor harsh in virtue’s quest,

MADAME DE STAËL

Possessing all those gifts from Nature's store
Seeming opposed, but crowning you the more,
Though warring with each other. . . .

All prejudice lies prostrate at your feet."

This is exactly the note on which Germaine, in person, chants the praises of the Minister of Finance.

Towards the end of Chapter IV. of her *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* Madame de Staël makes this allusion to her father :

"I saw that the most amazing genius was allied with the purest of hearts and loftiest of souls ; I saw that neither passions nor faults of character could lead astray the very sublimest qualities with which a man has ever been endowed."

In the composition of *Sophie*, theme, action, characters were all taken by Germaine from herself and her surroundings.

No use whatever has been made of inventive imagination.

There is not enough of it to make this drama of family life fit for production on the stage.

To have a root-idea, acute feelings and models to draw from will not suffice for the creation of drama.

There is no doubting the portraiture, but the likenesses are not good ones.

They are feeble efforts at creation, scrawls left in soft wax by the semi-automatic gestures of a young intelligence.

As a play it is nothing ; as a human document it is of capital importance.

JANE GREY

There is an interval between the composition of *Sophie* and of *Jane Grey* of which it is difficult to determine the precise duration, but it was a time of

great importance in the life of the young married woman.

There is no doubt that her education proceeded rapidly.

Madame de Staël was now given many opportunities of finding her own level accurately; of knowing herself.

Her character deepens and takes definite shape.

The first conclusion arrived at from this self-knowledge was the acknowledgment of her marriage as a failure.

One may read this between the lines of *Jane Grey*.

In proportion as happy marriage appears to her more and more as a mirage, the more firmly is she attached to it as an ideal, the more she excites herself on the subject of this rare felicity which can fill a woman's whole life and render her indifferent to all the catastrophes which can possibly menace her outside it.

Like *Sophie*, *Jane Grey* is the history of a sacrifice.

That lamentable chapter of English history which has afforded Rowe an opportunity of encouraging the detestation of Catholicism in his compatriots, has undergone a singular transformation in the hands of Madame de Staël.

The moral pointed by Rowe*, disappears altogether. The religious question, which is very important from the historical point of view, and very useful as dramatic material, is reduced to a few Voltairian observations in which Lady Jane Grey commits herself philosophically into the hands of God and of the English people, especially the English people, for the solution of the vexatious problems which beset her.

* See Vol. 7 of Bell's *British Theatre*, which contains Rowe's play. This is probably the text used by Madame de Staël. Vol. 7 was published in London in November, 1776. The Neckers had already returned to Paris. As far as I can discover there was no representation of *Jane Grey* while the Neckers were in London.

MADAME DE STAËL

It was evidently not as a martyr of the Protestant faith that Lady Jane Grey interested her co-religionist.

Madame de Staël sees her only as a young wife whose rare happiness is violently interrupted, and as one might express it . . . sanctified, crowned by death.

She maintains that she and Jane Grey are exactly alike in temperament : such is the resemblance that Madame de Staël tells us in the preface that she is "transported" by it.

As they are of the same age she feels that Lady Jane's youthfulness is "an encouragement" to her own ; and there is the same combination of strength and weakness in their characters, there are the same studious tastes, for Jane reads Plato, just as Germaine reads Montesquieu ; the same reserves are made in favour of the heart which at all costs is to take precedence of the head.

To quote Jane in Scene IV., Act II. :

"Ah ! how we must dread the sublime gift of genius if it forbids us the happiness of love."

There is also the same admiration of England, for Madame de Staël "makes Jane a present of her own."

Only Germaine's weaknesses, her wild exuberance, and equally violent depressions, are absent here, though they are shewn in *Sophie*.

Only greatness is to be depicted here.

Jane is invested beforehand with the high seriousness of her destiny.

She might be a sister of Germaine's, who had absorbed Madame Necker's precepts better than Germaine.

Madame de Staël does not pity Jane. She never dreams of such a thing. She envies her.

"I should like to have been able to rouse such an admiration as I feel for her . . ." she says in the preface.

What she particularly admires is very well defined in one of her cousin's discriminating bits of criticism.

"The heroine's position presents the author's very ideal of felicity from the first: marriage with her hero, whom she loves to adoration; all the joys which are at the disposal of a great intelligence; and in the future a brilliant or a baleful fate . . . but either way . . . glory!"

This felicity is in no way destroyed by death.

On the contrary, Madame de Staël considers death at the zenith of great love as the apotheosis of a woman's life.

JANE:

"Time might have brought a changing fate!
Time might have taught the words 'too late.'
Too late for love; Time turns the page!
Too late for all but frozen age.
We shall not die by inches, in such fashion!
We, you and I, will die unrobbed, and whole . . .
And the last sigh of all our burning passion
Shall slip out with each soul. . . ."

GUILDFORD:

.
.
.

"Oh sweetheart! Blind my eyes with passion!
Blind my eyes . . . that so they may not see
Onrushing horror, that is yet to be."

Far from attempting to soften the horror of the death-scene, Madame de Staël strains her slight resources to the utmost to make the climax of the drama poignant.

She makes it evident that Lady Jane Grey was the living symbol of all feminine beauty, truth and goodness.

Like Sophie she reigns over all hearts, even that of the shaggy old wolf, Northumberland, whom the

MADAME DE STAËL

author, fresh from the perusal of Macbeth and Hamlet, has endeavoured to invest with Shakespearean ruggedness.

Her husband adores her just as she adores her husband : and Pembroke, who, in this play carries on the role of Lord Henry Bedford, is irresistibly drawn into her orbit.

No less than Sophie, Lady Jane dominates everyone around her.

It is she in this case who tunes all her admirers up to the pitch of self-sacrifice.

Pembroke devises a means of helping Jane to escape from prison, gains access to her cell as a confessor, and begs her to escape in his monkish habits. Jane despatches this too-accommodating confessor to her husband's cell, where he is languishing alone in another part of the prison.

He escapes, but learning that his wife is to go to the block he returns, and is executed after her.

Pembroke, in his turn, attempts to commit suicide.

From this play, one would say that Jane would have been much disappointed if this opportunity of great death had been taken from her.

She deliberately blocks all issues, and mounting the scaffold at the end, gives to the whole world a spectacle of supreme sacrifice, a revelation of the boundless force of love in the heart of a woman, *who knows that she is loved*.

JANE :

“ My only love ! That soul of passion, ours,
That wove our marriage-wreath with all love's
flowers,

Tastes our felicity with too much bliss,
To live without an anguished heart, in this,
The onslaught of misfortune. . . .

.
.

For mortal love is dread of sacrifice ! ”

This exaltation is significant.

This is love *à la* Jean Jacques Rousseau, theoretic, nostalgic, warming itself at the smouldering ashes of the great flames of love in the past.

What the author possesses is marriage without love. What she dreams of, is the association of love and death; the sacrifice of life to the infinite reality of love.

Having taken up writing for the theatre quite seriously, Madame de Staël changes her mind, abandons the attempt without any fuss and never returns to it.

In 1806 she threw herself into the production of other people's plays with the greatest enthusiasm, and amused herself in clearing up the confusion of a stage setting or in choosing and designing costumes.

She turned actress herself.

From time to time she would dash off a little piece, sometimes comic, sometimes sentimental, and would introduce it into the programme of the evening.

But it was usually done to give her children a lesson in elocution by making them act with her.

It was to be understood that her serious aims were elsewhere, and that she only turned to the theatre to amuse herself.

This abstention was partly due to the absence of much creative impulse.

Madame de Staël was never very successful in breathing life into her work.

But there is obviously another reason.

Already, without wishing it or perceiving it, she has only one subject: herself.

For that, the unyielding frame which must surround a theatrical piece, was a nuisance to her. This is why she turned quite quietly to the use of more fluid forms.*

* See Note. Appendix C.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS : THE NOVELS 1786-1787

THE drama-form imposed a salutary discipline on Madame de Staël, constraining her to enclose her exuberant personality within its limits and shackling her vein for improvisation in chains, for the deadly "forced labour" of French versification.

She fully compensated herself for all this restraint by pouring out the whole contents of her heart and brain simultaneously into some prose romances, of which three survive.

No doubt there were others, but it is doubtful whether we need regret the loss of them.

L'Histoire de Pauline, *Mirza*, and *Adelaide et Théodore* give us a good idea of the successive stages of Madame de Staël's moral development at this time, and make her interesting physiognomy sufficiently well-known to us; while their literary qualities do not encourage us to wish that she had perpetrated any more compositions of this nature.

Indeed, Madame de Staël not only takes advantage of the more elastic form she is using to spread out in every direction, but she also permits herself to borrow right and left.

The unfavourable opinions formed on reading Germaine's journal are here realized and surpassed.

That absolute freedom in her literary education to which Sainte-Beuve has made a charming allusion*

* "I imagine her in her schoolroom under the eye of her mother, who is sitting with her: Germaine is walking up and down, and whenever she advances towards her mother she reads the volume of her task, and, while walking away from her, snatches a moment for the sentimental romance, some novel of Madame Riccoboni's, perhaps, which is engaging her attention at the moment. *Portraits de Femmes*, p. 89.

THE NOVELS 1786-1787

seems, from its first fruits, to have had a deplorable effect upon her.

It seems to have been demonstrated more than once, that the worst preparation for novel-writing is novel-reading.

Between Germaine and the face of Life which she proposes to describe, there is the huge tumble-down structure of all the trash she has read surreptitiously or otherwise.

In *L'Histoire de Pauline*, which is the feeblest of the three, she accomplishes that *tour de force* of arriving by way of imitation (imitation of Madame Riccoboni and de Baculard) at that unconscious but finished example of caricature which constitutes the romantic school of writing.*

This mixture of sincere feeling and uncritical imitation is not the least curious element in her fiction.

It is strange to see this woman of great intelligence, for she is already that, hanging her flabby forms with the faded garlands of romantic fiction, and that without the least repugnance, indeed, with evidence of artless joy in it.

She is satisfied with very little as literary material. For originality she relies on the fashion of the moment. It is not that which interests her. Madame de Staël wrote because she wanted to write about love.

That is the main revelation of these stories.

She is in love with love.

She is the first victim of all the lovers she creates.

She is curious about the passion, and until something better turns up she will know it by writing about it, as hitherto she has known it by reading of it.

L'HISTOIRE DE PAULINE

Just at this period the question of the slave-trade first came into prominence.

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

Bernadin de Saint-Pierre had been heralded as a great man after the appearance of the first series of *Étude de la Nature*.

Madame de Staël had this in mind when she borrowed from the author of *Paul et Virginie* (who had given a reading of this work in her mother's *salon*) one of those "burning climates" where man "is solely occupied in some barbarous pursuit of gain."

Pauline, for that is the orphan-heroine's name, is "beautiful as the day," charming and sensitive, all of which does not exempt her from complete neglect on her husband's part.

Before long she had no idea what to do with her time, "or her gay disposition," which turns to melancholy and vents itself like that of *Sophie*, in a plaintive little song.

After this, one evening at a ball, she abandons herself to the passion of a young man who dies shortly afterwards in France, not however without having received from his "passionate mistress" some very long letters, where the young and tender soul of the writer is depicted in a very strange style, a soul which "unites the characteristics of childhood with those of riper years."

But Pauline, in spite of her natural chastity, gives herself once more, and this time without the "excuse of love," before she is reclaimed for the path of virtue.

What Madame de Staël wishes to point out, is that in point of fact the poor child has never left it.

Selfish men have taken advantage of her innocence.

If we find Madame de Staël insisting upon this point, it is because she has learnt, and is learning every day since her marriage, what the men who surround her, are really like in their relations with women.

She is shocked by the meaninglessness of the appellation, "a man of honour," which is lavished on those who are honourable in all transactions but those with women.

Pauline's seducer "passed as a man of honour because he had never been cruel and dishonourable except to women."*

So that we see that one theme of the book is the injustice of the male sex to women; the other is marriage.

Pauline goes to France.

She beats *Sophie* and *Jane Grey* hollow in attractiveness.

Her person emanates such a powerful seductiveness that one day, walking along the esplanade at Havre, she finds herself suddenly surrounded by all the young men of the town, who exclaim with one voice :

"How beautiful she is !"

Just then Fate ushers upon the scene a certain Colonel Edouard de Cerney, "whose long drooping lashes lend a certain gentleness, and even shyness, to the otherwise martial characteristics of his face."

He breaks through the crowd, rescues the embarrassed girl from all this importunate admiration, and conducts her to a stand, from which she can witness the manœuvres of his dragoons unmolested.

After this, events move with extreme rapidity. A dragoon is thrown from his charger. Edouard, in rushing to save him, is himself knocked down and trampled under the horses' hoofs.

Consternation reigns in the troop.

The colonel is carried into a house near-by, in an inanimate condition; there, surgeons examine his injuries and reassure the regiment which is besieging the door.

The junior officers in their turn, reassure Pauline.

But plunged in a prolonged reverie, she hardly notices that she is surrounded by something like a

* Even here there is, perhaps, some literary suggestion. The publication in 1780 of Rousseau's *Amours de Milord Edouard* had set the fashion for virtuous and repentant courtisans, as well as letting loose the idea that virginity is no virtue.

MADAME DE STAËL

score of young officers, drawn to her by her aura of irresistible attraction.

Edouard having recovered, and knowing nothing of the sorrows of Pauline's past, proposes marriage to her.

He himself is characterised by a quality singular "in his country and at his age," he "observes the strictest austerity in the conduct of his private life."

In her presence he discourses unceasingly on female virtue, which does not fail to embarrass the girl, whom he believes to be one of its most perfect examples.

Fearing for the future, Pauline heroically repels his advances, and only yields when she discovers him in the posture of Saint-Preux or of Gloucester, preparing to put an end to his misfortunes kneeling on a rock which projects into the sea, "with dishevelled hair, and in an attitude of despair."

She marries him and courts death when chance makes her husband aware of her "fatal dissimulation."

While dying she explains the moral of the story.

Happiness in marriage is a rare and perfect joy.

One either has it completely or not at all.

It depends on the equilibrium of the most delicate shades of feeling.

It is a form of perfection which never undergoes decay.

In marriage sins may be forgiven, but not deception, for without candour how can there be understanding?

Between husband and wife, the most fatal and quite the stupidest mistake is deception.

MIRZA

The principal theme of *L'Histoire de Pauline*, the injustice of men to women, is taken up again and elaborated in *Mirza*.

In *Mirza* it is no longer a case of general injustice to the generality of women, but of injustice to a woman,

apart from her kind ; a woman who thinks, or, if you like, a woman of genius.

The setting is very much like that of *L'Histoire de Pauline*, but is treated in a more detailed manner.

Bernadin has been studied to more purpose ; we are no longer gasping in the " burning climate " of nowhere in particular, but in Senegal.

Madame de Staël had gleaned some reliable information about this colony from M. de Boufflers, who, at that moment, in November, 1786, was on the point of returning there with the object of starting sugar culture.

Ximéo, the hero of *Mirza*, follows the example of M. de Boufflers (whose humanitarian zeal was much admired by Madame de Staël) by shewing the natives how to emancipate themselves from white tyranny by means of free trade.*

In *Mirza* the matter of the story is so very personal an affair that there is far less of the romantic element than in *Pauline*.

One begins to feel that Madame de Staël has made real strides in the art of writing.

The less there is to invent the more sure of herself she is, and therefore the more readable.

Mirza was not a beautiful woman.

Gibbon tells us that " Germaine's fascination proceeded far more from mental than physical beauty."

This is exactly the case with *Mirza*.

" Her grand figure, enchanting eyes, and the

* See the third budget of news addressed by Madame de Staël to Gustavus III., 4th November, 1786: " The Chevalier de Boufflers is just going back to Senegal; a fine example, for it needs strength of mind to leave Paris for Senegal. He has a project for the establishment of sugar-culture, and to employ the African natives in free cultivation of this commodity, which is the cause of all their misfortunes. . . Unfortunately, the negroes are incredibly lazy if left free—which is the white man's excuse. . . . Yet, details M. de Bouffler has told me of slave-existence are quite excruciating. . . "

Geffroy, *Gustave III. et la Cour*: " This passage fixes the date of *Mirza* as the end of 1786."

MADAME DE STAËL

brilliant animation of her face, left love nothing to desire, as to beauty of feature."

Mirza is a poet "who loves to dream on the mountains" and at the same time sings the praise of liberty and the horror of all slavery.

For all her superiority of mind she is very much a woman.

She aspires to full knowledge of love: which can absorb the whole of life and by its own power alone brings happiness to every instant of the day.

Ximéo is the desired lover who undertakes to teach her what she knows already: "that intellectual pleasure is not enough," and that "only ecstasy which includes the emotions can suffice to all the faculties of the soul."

Mirza loves, and abandons herself to being loved.

Indeed, she loves more than she is loved, for mental power in her case, fans the flame.

In spite of a certain ascendancy which she attains over Ximéo, his passion cools, as hers burns more fiercely.

Before long he deserts her to marry a gentle girl of his own tribe, who is ravishingly beautiful, and possesses the appeal of the feminine in the grace, and real weakness of fibre which may be dominated by any man.

Poor Mirza is dashed from the heights of joy to the depths of despair, being numbered among those passionate souls who must be at one extreme or the other.

She commits suicide, and Ximéo, prevented by an oath from following her example, drags the burden of his remorse to the end of his days.

One would say that Madame de Staël had discovered what would thenceforth and for ever be the great and tormenting problem of her own life. She is already working it out on paper, twisting and turning it. But she cannot find the solution.

Already her mind is leaving the problem of her marriage in the lurch, to launch itself into one that is far more complicated.

Since leaving her sheltered existence at home she has perceived that women need something more than great intelligence and mental power to attract and hold men; and that these qualities in women may even be looked upon as drawbacks by men.

The acquisition of this knowledge was very disturbing to her, as she felt the need of the love and admiration of men.

She has had a vision of the man who will some day hold her captive: he is beautiful as Apollo Belvedere (see Léonce in *Delphine*) and he will fascinate her by a strange mixture of strength and weakness, which combines the grace of a stripling with the courage of a warrior.

She even sees how he will treat her.

Ximéo already sketches the gesture of Oswald in *Corinne*; of Fernand in the little story of *Zulma*; and of Léonce in *Delphine*.

With a glance which "disposes of her soul altogether," and that soul formed entirely of lofty and sensitive passion, he becomes the docile instrument of his tribe, or family—call it society.

When he is not under the immediate personal magnetism of his beloved one, who, in his presence can maintain her ascendancy, he is ready for any depths of treacherous submission to the droning admonitions of society.

ADÉLAÏDE ET THÉODORE

Madame de Staël's curiosity about Senegal did not long survive the departure of the Chevalier de Boufflers.

Even while listening to his descriptions she was astonished that anyone could prefer an island full of black men to Paris.

She entirely failed to grasp the significance of Bernadin's precise and vivid detail, or at any rate she did not pay more than passing attention to it.

Even in taking inspiration from him she had no thought of imitating him where he was really original.

As a matter of fact, the exotic had very little fascination for her.

If, later on in 1795, she indicates without describing a wild setting on the banks of the Orinoco for *Zulma* it is because she had most excellent reasons for transporting this story which reveals so much, out of Europe.

Henceforward, without recanting the romantic faith altogether, she tries to bend it to her own purposes.

Letting her pen run on, dwelling only on what interested her, and refraining from burdening her imagination with invention for which it was little fitted, she brings us into her own circle in Paris, and quite quietly, hardly noticing where she is going, she starts on a new road which turns out to be the road leading to the greatest triumphs of her literary career.

Adélaïde et Théodore is the "novel of manners" in embryo. Not that Madame de Staël had any definite intention of adopting this form, for we may question whether she had ever defined to herself the nature of a novel at all except in agreeing with Madame de Genlis that it was something which contained a moral.

But this is the first time that we meet her in literature as a society woman: the first time that we hear the echo of her laughter or the sharp explosions of her epigrams, or the shimmering cascade of acutely mischievous observations which she lets fall; and we hear at the same time, though slightly muffled, the plaintive note of a woman who is not happy in her marriage, the sighs of a soul unsatisfied and craving.

We move in a little group of secondary characters who are perfectly distinct and recognisable.

Orville, Adélaïde's guardian, a selfish old confirmed bachelor, bored by his responsibility, is finely drawn in a few strokes, with a bold, sure touch which takes us by surprise.

He is "a taking man, easy to get on with, but of so volatile a nature that it would be difficult to fix his attention for a quarter of an hour, even to save half his fortune for him.

"This made him an amusing man to meet.

"His distinctive quality had been called irresponsibility in his youth, and now that age was drawing down upon him, was dubbed a philosophical outlook.

"The results were the same, only the name was changed. He never took action in anything evil, or anything very difficult, but from want of moral stamina he easily slid into both.

"He was not a man with a system . . . either of morality or immorality.

"He nearly always set his face against anything customary, anything profound, anything which was difficult or required effort to carry it out."

This was another example of a man of honour towards the end of the "ancien régime" bearing and exterior altogether irreproachable, charming to get on with, but morally inaccessible and impossible to hold or tie down to anything.

Madame d'Orfeuil, to whom Orville confides his ward to be chaperoned, is a woman of thirty; "She believed herself to be still wildly in love with her husband who had deserted her, or, rather, being excessively pious, she had never dared to lose hold on this passion for fear of being seized by another."

M. de Linières, a good man, but as stupid as it is possible to find in France, is the kind of husband to whom guardians like Orville (who know the world well enough to have a huge respect for stupidity) give their wards in marriage when they are determined to get rid of them decently.

MADAME DE STAËL

There is nothing banal in this gallery.

The portraits we feel certain are drawn from life, much in the same fashion that the ambassadress described the originals when she met them in her social life.

The only pity of it is that, having drawn them, the author hangs them up on the wall instead of letting them move and breathe like living beings.

The sketch has some difficulty in turning into a real live person.

Yet from time to time the breath of life is there.

We know that before his marriage with Germaine, the Baron de Staël was very well received at Court, especially by Madame de la Marck, Madame de Luxembourg, the Countess Jules de Polignac, Madame de Chalons, Madame de Gontaud and others.

Old Madame de Boufflers loved him "as a son."

No doubt Madame de Staël was only too well acquainted with these ladies.

One cannot but suspect that she took some of them as models for the circle of old scandal-mongers which surrounded the impatient youthfulness of Adélaïde :

"Orville's women friends were very attentive to Adélaïde, and every one of them by way of proving her interest undertook to direct some portion of her toilet.

"They gave her advice which was neither good nor bad, they left her conduct to chance, but they were very much concerned about the well-being of her *amour-propre*, because they keenly desired success for her.

"When women of a certain age are not jealous of a young person, they are vain *for* her, and any success of her's must somehow have emanated from their influence if they are to see her with any pleasure.

"Adélaïde's brain was set in a whirl by all the novelty round her.

"She wanted to talk about love.

* See Note. Appendix C.

"The ladies replied to her questions by saying that the best way of inspiring love was to avoid bright colours if you were dark or pale ones if you were fair."

The psychology here is not deep, but it is acute, and we cannot avoid noticing the attitude of the observer.

It is not devoid of impertinence.

Where wit is concerned this young woman is very cocksure ; perhaps too much so.

But it is more a destructive than a constructive talent.

The positive ability to dump down a complete man with all his physical attributes before our eyes is lacking.

Positively the only detail in *Adélaïde et Théodore* which betrays the slightest attention to things seen is the description of Adélaïde in a condition when " her heart beat so violently that her dress rose and fell with the palpitation " ; and this image has already been used in exactly the same words in "*La Folle de la Forêt de Senart* " as follows :

" . . . but at this moment the winding of a horn resounded through the forest and at the sound of it she was seized with convulsive trembling all over ; her heart beat so violently that her dress rose and fell . . . etc."

This is not reassuring, as the image is slightly ludicrous for use even on one occasion ; to have used it twice is a confession of weakness.

In other respects Adélaïde turns out to be nearly related to Mirza and Pauline.

Brought up in the country by an ultra-sensitive woman, like Sophie, she has chiefly learned to be sentimental and excitable and to read novels. She is also genuinely pious.

She is snatched from her solitude to be delivered up to a husband aged sixty, M. de Linières.

MADAME DE STAËL

M. de Linières has had an interview with Orville in which he declares "that he has a large income, that he has reached the age of sixty, that he is very much in love with Orville's niece and will marry her in a week's time."

Adélaïde's guardian "is struck by the general suitability of this arrangement," and gives a rapid and eager consent.

Only Adélaïde is in despair for the interview of the two elderly gentlemen has "robbed her of romance."

The day after her marriage she writes to her aunt that "they have done for her future, that the happiness of loving is for ever forbidden her and that henceforth, knowing neither happiness nor misfortune, she will be indifferent to everything."

This was not exactly Germaine's point of view on the eve of her marriage.

But Madame de Staël had adopted sentimental objections to the marriage of convenience since, objections which she had not raised in her own case, at a time when she felt decidedly that her very next step must be marriage; though they began to acquire an elegiac and retrospective importance during the first year of her union with de Staël.

However that may be, she *had* written to her mother in an early morning note on her wedding-day :

"To-night I shan't be coming home to you. This is the last day I shall live through, the same as all the time before it.

"Making a change like this costs me a great deal, I can tell you. It will be difficult for me to take up an entirely different existence, and fear of the unknown makes me feel worse about the whole thing. . . . Every moment I foresee regrets . . . and what then . . . ? Will happiness come afterwards . . . ? Will it come now and then . . . ? Will it never come ? . . .

"Death is the end of all this . . . and are you sure that there is a future life ? "

This certainly bears some resemblance to Adélaïde's complaint.

Adélaïde becomes afraid of being left alone " with the most boring husband in the world."

She goes out a great deal, and learns the art of "*bombinans in vacuo*," like other good members of society.

Above all she wishes to escape her own thoughts by plunging into a whirlpool of gaiety.

Having an adaptable character, well dosed with frivolity, she soon forms the ineradicable habit of life in the social world.

M. de Linières has the good taste " to shuffle off this mortal coil " ; he dies.

All is not lost for Adélaïde.

She bounds eagerly into the unknown and meets Théodore. He is the embodiment of her dream.

Adélaïde's education has had a puzzling effect on her character which appears to be simultaneously serious and frivolous.

" The sight of a beautiful stretch of the country-side would set her dreaming, but the sound of a violin sent her scampering back to town."

At the same time any lightness in her character is absolutely inoffensive and in no way compromises the really good qualities of the charming young widow.

Let us note down these good qualities :

" . . . her sensibility, kindness and candour were unalterable, and her faults, which she frankly admitted, served to placate the envious and gave her friends a chance of chaffing her ; which was always amusing, and always well received."

It is true that in 1786 all Paris knew that the Swedish Ambassadress was an original and unaccountable person who would come to call without a hat, and

MADAME DE STAËL

had been obliged to retire and adjust her dress when she was presented at Court.

Madame de Staël seeks to conceal her own connection with this confession by giving Adélaïde "a gentle delicate face" and "fair hair," accompanied by "a dazzlingly fair skin."

The expression of this charming face betrayed duality of character, "extreme vivaciousness" is corrected by "an expression of romantic tenderness."

Adélaïde is not a widow for nothing.

From the moment that she meets Théodore "the extreme curiosity which she felt about such famous abilities mastered every other idea in her mind."

It is an absolute "possession," and Théodore is quite pleased about it.

Théodore is the perfect wooer, as well as being the most intelligent man in the world.

"Nothing ever kept him away from Adélaïde."

"His whole time was at the disposal of her commands"; for Adélaïde thinks nothing of love which is less than this.

Yet he did not make his declaration.

Adélaïde could not understand it.

"They were both free and there was no obstacle between them."

Sick of waiting, the imperious girl questions her aunt: "Will you never have something to say to me from the Comte de Rostain?"

She feels that she must possess his heart or die.

As we might have foreseen, she does possess it.

She and Théodore are secretly married.

Suddenly she gets a perfect mania to see Paris.

Madame de Staël knew what an imperious feeling this may be.

Adélaïde starts for the capital.

Parisian society welcomes her not only with pleasure but with *applause*, like that which rang through the

temple after the hymns of the priestess Zulma, but it was roused in the first place by her beauty.

She has nothing more pressing to do than to engage in a duel of mind with her husband, and Théodore is delighted to "show off and bring out" his wife.

Adélaïde not only loves dancing (a very normal taste), but she likes shining in conversation (which is perhaps not quite so normal) and she must have a husband who helps her to do it (which is not normal at all.)

But the book must have an ending.

Out of generosity, not vice, for the giddy girl has none in her composition, Adélaïde compromises herself.

She compromises herself very innocently, only so far involved as to be obliged to infringe the compact of candour which must exist between husband and wife.

Théodore's jealousy is inflamed.

Here is an end to married happiness. Théodore takes poison and Adélaïde follows his example.

The moral is the same as that of *L'Histoire de Pauline* :

"Once you allow yourself to practise concealment with the man you love, you will find the effect upon yourself quite incalculable.

"Explanations, complaints and reproaches may be wiped out to leave no trace, but silence devours the heart on which it is imposed."

To this is added a commentary reflected from Madame Necker's old admonitions to the small Germaine, to love "those innocent pleasures which end by disgusting you with the fever and display of town life."

The juxtaposition is not without importance.

It would not be just to take it as a mere literary echo with no meaning attached to it.

On the contrary, if the evidence in these three stories does not deceive, it is clear that the first

MADAME DE STAËL

experience of life in Paris caught Madame Necker's daughter at a disadvantage in some ways.

There is no question of revolt or of anger, but there is a conflict of impressions.

She does not like the affected cynicism of the manners and morals, especially those of the men ; she does not like the brainless frivolity of the women nor the malice hidden under pretty manners.

But she does like the quick, frank spirit ; the jolly sense of being perpetually on the go ; the excitement which lighted rooms, humming with talk, inject into the veins of women ; she does like all this, though apologising as if for a sin or a weakness, for in principle she still upholds the Puritanism of her mother.

From a literary point of view these artless stories have one merit in common and that is *pace*.

The writer's impatience is at least as great as the reader's.

That is why, though dangerously near to evoking boredom, they escape that peril.

From the point of view of material they are all stories of unsuccessful marriage.

And the strange thing is that they never ought to have been that.

The couples love each other and suit each other.

But Fate is unkind, and particularly unkind to this sublime institution.

It seemed to Madame de Staël in 1786 that the chances are all against happy union.

A featherweight will crush the flower of this rare and exquisite variety of happiness.

CHAPTER V

MADAME DE STAËL AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS

It was not long before the Swedish Ambassadors became a personage in upper, and upper-middle-class society in Paris, differently appreciated, but universally known and talked about.

She had been formally presented at Court on January 1st, 1786, about a fortnight after her wedding.

She had dined that very day, one of a party of twenty-four, at the most magnificent banquet with which an ambassador was ever honoured at the Court of France, presided over by the Princesse de Chimay, one of Marie-Antoinette's ladies-in-waiting.

For the first six months it was a giddy rapture.

She abandoned herself to it, intoxicated by the exquisite sensation of being a very great lady indeed, fêted by the cream of society in the leading capital of Europe.

M. de Vergennes entertained her at dinner at the same time as the Spanish Ambassador and gave them each an arm to lead them to dinner in order to avoid the embarrassment of choosing between them.

On February 13th, at a reception of the Academy for her friend and admirer Guibert, who declaimed an emphatic discourse, the incident occurred which she has related in *Adélaïde et Théodore*, the whole distinguished audience greeted her arrival with applause.

At the Queen's balls, which were very brilliant that season, while her husband handled the new shekels that his marriage had provided him with in the card-room, she was lost in admiration of the great "winter-garden," where she said, "you could taste

MADAME DE STAËL

all the joy of summer and the country," and at the same time, the exquisite luxury of a surperfine civilisation which her young senses absolutely refused to condemn.

It was there, no doubt, in the enchantment of those shaded lights, harmonious chords and floating perfumes, that Necker's daughter (who had been ordered to keep the principles of her Swiss education to herself whatever happened) allowed the powdered courtiers to whisper in her ear jests and inuendoes of a certain snaky coldness, such that she was never quite certain whether she was horrified or fascinated by them.

She had a real consciousness of emancipation and keenly enjoyed being her own mistress at last, and she took advantage of it to let herself drift a little.

It was a question of being in the mode.

She did not want to be taken for a country cousin.

Being an ambassadress she was obliged to be a great deal in Court circles.

When at Fontainebleau, she supped three times a week with Madame de Polignac, three times a week with the ill-fated Madame de Lamballe, and once a week in the Royal private apartments.

In town, as the dictates of fashion command the luxurious to concern themselves with the poverty they have helped to create, she took part in so-called charity functions where the victims of the system of government were invited to attend in order to describe their sufferings in detail.

Four or five times a week in the rue Bergère, or at the Swedish Embassy in the rue du Bac she received a perfect host of guests, some drawn by their curiosity to see the latest thing in ambassadresses; others, scenting Necker's imminent return to office.

Her lavish hospitality was rather that associated with bankers' daughters.

Even the Queen was slightly shocked and begged

AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS

her to be more moderate, upon which Madame de Staël really touched by what she considered a delicate attention from the Queen, reduced the number of her *entrées* to sixteen, and thought she was doing marvels. All this was not enough for her indefatigable vitality.

She wrote quite at random, with no fixed plan, and in her odd moments, plays and novels, verse and prose, all by fits and starts, and principally as an outlet for the overflow of her emotional life which poured out like a torrent perpetually in spate.

Every three months, having taken over from Madame de Boufflers the duty of sending a budget to the King of Sweden, she fashioned a report of society doings for the royal eye, copiously watered with epigrams, spiced with scandal and heavy with flattery which was not over-delicate, addressed to one who was the controller of her husband's fortunes.

At first she takes a good deal of pleasure in it.

But in the long run by dint of describing this life as busy as the life of a hive, in which yet there was nothing done, she begins to perceive the emptiness, and having first made it a duty to write as a *Parisienne*, we soon find her making excuses for it, finding her own little jokes and bits of malice very petty, and not likely to be at all appetising, especially when read a week after they were written.

Before six months were over she was disillusioned and was asking herself where all this was going to lead to ; of what use was this perpetual fête and what she, Baronne de Staël, Swedish Ambadress and daughter of Necker, was to do with herself in this particular bedizened galley ?

“ Society in Paris,” she wrote in her second budget of news, “ gets more and more insipid. One loses even the desire to shine, and if we had not the desire to win at play I do not know what would keep us alive at all.”

If Paris loved her, Versailles, though she did not

MADAME DE STAËL

lose her taste for the charm of its bygone elegance, could not fail to seem corrupt and imbecile as far as society was concerned.

From this judgment only the Queen is excepted. She has hearty praise for the goodness and charming manner of Marie-Antoinette (November, 1786).

She respects the King largely because she never sees him, and is disposed to believe all the good she can of him.

But the courtiers seemed to her pitiable creatures : always ready to pose, terribly circumspect and jealous, with ill-furnished minds and cold hearts.

They paid her in her own coin.

From her very first appearance at this Court, where, according to the Duc de Coigny, it was better to be vicious than ridiculous, she was the object of much ridicule.

It could hardly have been otherwise.

Necker's reputation at Court was that of being " a very starchy sort of Cagliostro, with stiff, disagreeable manners."

Her mother was called " the governess," who " must have been soaked in a bucket of starch."

Even if Madame de Staël had been the most fascinating *débutante* who ever appeared, she could not have got off unscathed.

And she was not really beautiful, though she had beautiful eyes ; she only lighted up to real beauty as she grew animated in conversation.

At her very presentation she was the victim of just the sort of misfortune one would expect for her.

While making her third curtsey she ripped some of the trimming off her dress, and would have been in sore embarrassment at the famous banquet for twenty-four if the Queen had not come to the rescue by sending her to the royal apartments to repair and refit.

This affair was duly commented on at the Duchesse

AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS

de Bourbon's, and the whole clique present, decided pleasantly, that M. de Staël, so perfectly at home in his position, had little cause for congratulation in his bride, who had shewn herself to be awkward, constrained, and out of place in the courtly atmosphere of Versailles.

Marie-Antoinette was of the same opinion, or was on the high road to it.

Things had begun to take a bad turn for Germaine in 1787.

The Queen betrayed her unfavourable attitude, when pressed by Madame de Staël to intervene with the King in favour of Necker, who had been exiled in May for having published his *Mémoire Justificatif* without permission.

Deeply hurt, Madame de Staël imposed upon her husband an attitude of wounded dignity and reserve.

All to no purpose.

The day after Necker was nominated Controller-General, Madame de Staël visited the Queen, arriving at the same moment as the niece of the Archbishop of Lens; and she immediately perceived from the welcomes accorded to them, that the Queen much preferred the retiring Minister, to the Minister who had just come into office.

This time the Ambassadors was resigned to it.

Though preserving perfect loyalty to the person of the Queen, she vowed herself, her husband and the Embassy, to the service of Necker.

She arrogated to herself before all Paris, and, under the very nose of Versailles, a sovereignty which Marie-Antoinette was powerless to dispute with her, the sovereignty of mind.

Later on, after the two days of October 5th and 6th, 1789—above all after the deplorable adventure of Varennes—Madame de Staël had a revulsion of pity, which became, in the month of June, a passion of remorse and sacrifice,

MADAME DE STAËL

She offered to give up anything, even her own life, to save the royal family from the horrible danger which threatened it.

The answer was, that the King and Queen would accept of nothing from Madame de Staël.

This tacit disapproval was no doubt largely political in origin, but it was also partly personal.

We have not the slightest doubt that in the presence of the Queen, Madame de Staël was awkward and constrained.

She found herself deprived of all her weapons; always weapons of assault.

She was almost incapable of silent deference, and the nervous constraint may well have expressed itself in all her limbs; it was such a horrible trial to her that it could not fail to be evident in her demeanour.

The same thing went on with lesser personages, who also stood on their dignity.

Madame de Boufflers' comments on the wife of her "little de Staël" are far from flattering.

She was really shocked at so much assurance in so young a woman.

She concludes from it, that though she had good principles (and here is another witness to the respectability of Madame de Staël's moral principles at the outset) she seemed to have very little knowledge of the ordinary usages of society.

Madame de Boufflers is also displeased because Germaine talks so much, and she concludes from this that the "new ambassadress has been quite spoilt by flattery of her abilities."

Madame de Boufflers makes this observation in a letter to Gustave III., and was perhaps spurred on by a certain eagerness to point out the defects of his new correspondent to the King of Sweden, but considering who she was, and what her obvious limitations must have been, we must allow that she kept within the rights of a ceremonious old cat of a

AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS

society woman, quite unable to perceive, or allow for, the unconscious boldness of genius.

Towards the end of 1786 M. and Madame Necker de Saussure came to renew acquaintance with their celebrated cousin, in her new guise of great lady. The opinion of these provincials was exactly that of Madame de Boufflers.

Writing her *Notice* in later years, and conscientiously describing those encounters of the mind in which Madame de Staël so often floored her opponent "as she went along," winning the support of everyone present, Madame de Saussure too often forgets how much she then disliked her cousin; for, as years went on, Time slowly but surely converted her mistrust into solid friendship.

In 1786 she was very little inclined to bow before a mind which only made her conscious that she had no mind to speak of herself.

The same thing is to be observed in the case of Charles and Rosalie de Constant.

The former, when supping with the Swedish Ambassadors, at about this time, felt himself to be a horribly insignificant person, "a miserable creature," only fit to be asked rapid questions by people who do not wait for the answer.

The conversation round him touched on actors, men of letters, and political personages of the day, while he was sitting quite mum and certain that he was taken for a "perfect fool."

So it is not surprising that he went home and vented his bile by whispering abuse of his hostess as a pedantic upstart.

Rosalie's opinion, which comes to the same thing, is an even more considered one, and it should be understood that these are witnesses who have stated their immediate impressions with perfect frankness and precision.

"Her abilities are too much above other people's

MADAME DE STAËL

to allow her to bring their's forward, or even to allow them to have any at all . . . " or again . . . " When she comes into the room nearly everybody else becomes a mere spectator." We hear the same note from Gouverneur Morris : On the 30th October, 1789, after calling on Madame de Staël, he writes : " The conversation too brilliant for me."

On the 4th November, of the same year, another call takes place, and he comments as follows : " Mental gymnastics of the highest order. I am not agile enough to take part."

For that matter the agreement is no less striking on the question of manners and way of dressing. Already in 1784, Miss Berry, passing through Lausanne, had noticed that Germaine's licence in these matters had shocked all English youth, presumably of either sex.

In 1786 Madame de Saussure criticises the almost vulgar magnificence of her dress, and agrees with Madame de Boufflers in pronouncing her untutored in the ordinary usages of society.

All these opinions are too spontaneous and too naturally-delivered to be suspect.

Except that of Gouverneur Morris, 27th March, 1879 (who expresses the same opinions very crudely by saying : " She looks like a servant "), they were all delivered before the publication of her *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, and are, therefore, very little coloured by party-spirit, if at all.

Taking everything into consideration, we do not find complete disillusionment in her new circle, but though she was paramount in it, she was not felt to fuse and belong.

Madame de Staël's critics were, to tell the truth, all perturbed, some more and some less, by the formidable amount of force which emanated from her very presence.

It is that which is at the bottom of their uneasiness.

AT VERSAILLES AND IN PARIS

They are disconcerted at finding so much invading and encroaching force in a woman.

As for herself, she is not happy because she has not found a channel for this force.

She is not so happy as she thought she would be.

She is perfectly aware that she is not so well thought of in Paris society as in the bosom of the Necker family.

But, so far, these are mere pin-pricks which she hardly feels. When the first intoxication is over she resumes her rôle of her father's ally.

CHAPTER VI

LETTERS ON THE CHARACTER AND WRITINGS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU—1788

MADAME DE STAËL, in concurrence with Meister, concocted a little myth about the circumstances of the publication of *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, which Sainte-Beuve was kind enough to repeat in 1835, in his *Portraits de Femmes*, and so it passed into the regions of received beliefs.

This is what Meister said himself in January, 1789 :

“ The work which we have the honour to announce, although printed, is not yet destined for the public, *indeed, it is not destined for the public at all.* We have to announce the *Letters* of Madame la Baronne de Staël, *on the Works and Character of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, a small volume in-12, of 140 pages.

“ Only twenty copies have been printed, which have only been confided to friends, and with infinite precautions against further publicity.

“ We do not think *we shall be betraying her secret* in trying to give you a little information as to the most interesting details of a production which we should have considered valuable, whoever the author had been.

“ It is impossible not to admire the work still more when we learn that it is the fruit of the unoccupied moments of a young woman of twenty, surrounded by all the illusions proper to her age, all the pleasures of the most brilliant section of society in town and at Court, and by all the homage drawn to her by her father’s reputation and her own celebrity.”

Meister had learnt his lesson well, but surely his pen made a side-slip when he wrote “ is not yet

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

destined for the public" . . . but then, see how it recovers its equilibrium to inscribe the words : "*indeed is not destined for the public at all.*"

We see it all ! This is a work dashed off by a society woman, a great lady, in her leisure moments, amid a thousand surrounding distractions, in which circumstances she has managed to note down her thoughts on a subject of public interest rather rapidly, and without attaching much importance to them, distributes her works among intimate friends entirely for their pleasure.

The *Second Preface*, which was written in 1814, and appears with the *Lettres* in the 1820 edition of the *Œuvres*, adds :

"*The Letters on the Works and Characters of J. J. Rousseau*, were written in the first year of my entry into society ; they were published without my knowledge, and this was the starting-point of my literary career."

All this is serious, as there seems not the smallest effort at sticking to the truth.

The 1788 edition was certainly anonymous.

But then we light on some such passage as this :

"The man whom posterity will salute as a many-sided genius (as his own time does), the man whom destiny and my affection allow me to call father. . . ."

Who could mistake the note ?

Even without a signature it could only be from the hand of Necker's daughter.

Moreover, it is quite certain that the work was not published without the author's permission.

Otherwise we can only suppose a grave breach of confidence on the part of one of Madame de Staël's friends, to whom a privately printed copy had been given—and also that Madame de Staël made no protest at the time, and waited until 1820 to refer to it.

Is that likely ?

Notice that the public edition appeared in 1788.

Now if the *Lettres* were written in the first year of Madame de Staël's marriage, in 1786, as she herself affirms, the text itself proves that it was not given its final form until after the appointment of Necker as Controller-General in September, 1788; and everything points to December, 1788, as the probable date of issue of the private edition announced by Meister.

Therefore, if the date of the public edition is not faked, which is always possible, both editions must have appeared at once.*

It is quite certain that there were two separate editions. Meister's was 140 pages in length, and the other 123 pages.

Madame de Staël did not make use of twenty early copies of the published edition, but all this being as it evidently was, only shews that in courting publicity for the first time, she took precautions to guard herself against a rebuff.

* First let us consider Auguste de Staël's comment on the famous passage which begins: "You great nation, soon to call an assembly for the consideration of your rights . . ." He says that "this invocation . . . was published six months before the opening of the States General, in 1789; therefore, six months after May, 1789." If we may rely on this evidence the public edition must then have appeared in December, 1788; or, on the other hand, if Madame de Staël's son only uses the word "published" loosely, he may refer to the private edition.

As Meister announces the latter in January, 1789, the last conjecture seems the probable one.

Now to compare the passage which concludes Letter IV.: ". . . Arise, O Rousseau! Arise from your ashes! And may your life-giving prophecies inspire the man who departs from all evil in quest of perfection; the man whom France has named her tutelary spirit, who, in her enthusiasm for him, sees only his duty towards her—the man, whom all must aid and abet as they would aid and abet the common weal, etc. . . ." with the letter of Madame de Staël to the King of Sweden, the day after Necker's nomination (Sept. 4th, 1788): "Sire, under other circumstances I should have felt great joy in making you aware of my father's nomination, *but he goes on board a vessel so nearly wrecked already that all my admiration for him hardly suffices to give me confidence in his success.*" (Geffroy, II., 87).

One would affirm that, except for the difference in tone, the first on a note of harangue, the second of official diplomatic communication, the sentiments expressed are identical.

It, therefore, seems to me a legitimate conclusion that the private copies were issued very shortly before the published edition in December, 1788.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

The circumstance which drew her into her literary career was the real and immediate popularity of her work.

A second edition appeared in 1789, and an English translation in the same year.*

Champcenetz, by order of Rivarol, drew up a retort.

The *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau* "responded to the movement of the day" as Sainte-Beuve remarks, which means that their very defects, the emphatic style, the extraordinary mixture of abstract ideas with practical politics, the obviously acute and sincere personal feeling which enveloped the whole, were warmly welcomed by a Pre-Revolution public.

But it was not a case of vague communion or a confluence of sympathies. It was a case of an appeal and a response.

Rousseau, from beyond the tomb, was just then assuming the guise of a political personage, and in Madame de Staël's work he is adroitly enrolled under the banner of Necker, to whom, in spite of the very slight agreement of their basic ideas, he is obliged to lend the support of a vague sentimental idealism.

The appeal to France as a nation is enforced by an appeal to the elect of the nation "*to form a league of Genius against the forces of Envy.*" You see very well where all this is leading. It is the daughter in support of the father, rallying France to his banner and forcing the nation to partake liberally of her own unshakable confidence in him.

What the book really amounts to is a political action; at any rate, that is what the author meant it to be. Let us agree with Sainte-Beuve that it was begun in 1787, although there is absolutely nothing in the text to authorise this supposition; on the contrary, there is evidence which makes it more reasonable to suppose that the *Lettres* were begun in

* Letters on the Works and Character of J. J. Rousseau, London, 1789, in-12, British Museum.

1788, if it is admitted as proved that she was still working on them after September, 1788.

Let us concede, then, that she made an early start on the task of knocking her work into its final shape, and also that she started simply with the idea of writing a panegyric on Jean-Jacques, after the fashion of the day, and of shewing it only to friends who shared the cult, it is none the less evident that her purpose was deflected by the pressure of circumstances and that the work ended by being a channel for the immediate preoccupations of her mind. Necker is about to make a supreme effort to save the ship of state : the engagement has begun : the ambassador can no longer hold her hand : she flings her bomb.

And this is what Madame de Staël calls her entry into a literary career !

We should rather have said that she was deserting literature in favour of politics.

In any case, that is how she became an author, as the word was interpreted in those days ; and she did it with her eyes open, or, rather, the real truth is that she was constrained to it by destiny, in obedience to an imperative inner necessity. If the *Lettres* had been a failure, she would simply have made another start.

It was the natural and inevitable unfolding of her being.

She had passed by successive stages from the little auditorium which contained only the family circle, and was quickly opened out to hold a wider one, that of Paris society, whom she held breathless by her wit, though she was apt to bore it when she gave one of her readings.

At last she came to the great final audience : the public. And just in proportion as her development advanced, so did she acquire more and more consciousness of her power, and more and more need and care for the suitable employment of it.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

But on entering for good upon this public life, which was as well suited to her character as to her genius, Madame de Staël carries with her an illusion of sacrifice.

See how she writes of it in 1785: "My father is right! Women were not made to have careers like men! To struggle against men and to excite in them a jealousy so different from that which passion brings them! A woman should have no care for her personal gifts, but should stake her all on the object of her love."

One would say from this that she had indeed resolved to make a central sun of love, whose rays were to create a warm beneficent atmosphere around her, from which all her inspiration and her very reason for existence was to be derived.

As for a literary career, that is to be a secondary consideration; she will only take it up to amuse herself and a little circle of intimate friends.

This might be called one of Germaine's Dreams. It was also a dream of Madame de Staël for a time. For Germaine it was a particular aspect in the great general problem of securing happiness.

In 1786, in the very year of her marriage, she invents the problem of Mirza, the woman of genius who dies because love has failed her; to whom it is said: "Mirza . . . how I pity you! Intellectual pleasure is not enough! Only ecstasy which includes the emotions of the heart can satisfy all the faculties of the soul."

In the following year, that of the birth of her first child, she writes in *Jane Grey*:

"Ah! how we must dread the gift of genius,
If it forbids the happiness of love!"

And here in the *Lettres* we find her excusing and explaining the pessimism of Jean-Jacques, because "Genius torments the possessor of it"; and again,

MADAME DE STAËL

"It is perhaps only at the expense of happiness that the extraordinary successes of genius can be won."

She brings the echo of this cry from book to book, until almost at the end of her career, when she sums up the immense burden of suffering that she has carried through life in a well-known passage, of which, however, too often, only the end is quoted :

"It is right to exclude women from political and municipal affairs: *nothing is more opposed to their natural vocation than anything which throws them into rivalry with men* and glory itself can only be to woman a splendid mourning over her lost happiness."*

In 1785 the note is lyrical; in 1810 it is elegiac, but the same feeling is carried through the interval of years. It remains constant.

There is always present a dull pain, an unconquerable regret, which from time to time looks backward to deplore the past.

It is the regret of a woman who almost curses the day she vowed herself to the arid rewards and perpetual mortifications of public life, and condemned herself to contests with men on the same footing as themselves; it is the pain of a woman who projects herself for consolation into an irrealisable dream of domestic happiness and loses herself in the mirage.

The sincerity of the feeling is beyond doubt: how should it not be sincere since it is natural?

But let us compare her words with her actions.

Can we believe that in 1788 Madame de Staël made a fatal error of judgment or that she was in any way the victim of circumstances?

Quite the contrary. What she did was not done by chance. She repeats it, and each time the gesture is bolder and more determined.

Hardly is the Revolution over before she takes up her pen to address the great public without any beating about the bush.

* From *l'Allemagne*, Edition Garnier, p. 524.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

When Napoleon recommends her forcibly to re-enter the soothing obscurity of private life, she dedicates to him the strongest measure of hatred of which her generous nature was capable.

She was free in 1802, when her Swedish husband died to make the marriage of her dreams at last. But she preferred to write *Delphine* and keep her liberty. She never ceased to lament the literary career that she had entered upon. But she took good care to remain in it. Her dæmon was her master. As early as 1788 she had a longing for fame. With the author of *Corinne* the instinct and thirst for glory preceded the consciousness of her genius.

Even when still a child, she had struggled with all the might of her small being towards the unique, irreplaceable bliss of that reward.

Applause "played on her heart-strings" like the sound of martial music.

Towards the end of her life, ill and prematurely exhausted, she wrote quite naturally something that seemed to her an ordinary, incontestable truth: "The only desire of genius is for glory," and she completes the thought with some words which might well have borne her signature in 1788, "and glory can only spring from public opinion."

It is for that reason that the bust of Washington by Houdon, which she saw in 1786, did not please her very much:

"It is the coldest face I ever saw in my life," she writes. "One would say that Washington was not keenly interested in anything and was quite indifferent to fame. He is like a doctor who does not believe in medicine."

By a chance, which is not a chance perhaps, the *Seconde Preface* to the *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau* one of the last documents to which Madame de Staël put her hand, contains a passage which reads like the last will and testament of her spirit. There, after the untoward opening that we have quoted, we

MADAME DE STAËL

read this curious continuation to the remarks on the adoption of a literary career:

“I should certainly not say that I regret it, for my literary career has brought me more joys than sorrows.”

And with less emphasis :

“This talent no doubt has its drawbacks like all the fine things of life, but these drawbacks seem to me far preferable to the nullities of a limited intelligence, which either depreciates those heights from which it is withheld, or affects to feel and understand where it can do neither. Finally, if we consider its effect upon ourselves alone, an added intensity of life is always an increase of happiness ; it is true that grief has a sharper grip upon minds of a certain power, but when all is said and done, there is no one who would not thank God for an added faculty.”*

This makes us certain that on the very edge of death Madame de Staël does not conceive of her life, cannot conceive of her life otherwise than it has been. She could not have been happy without fame.

The *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau* do not tell us anything very new about him, or anything that would not have been discovered without Madame de Staël's research. His influence was then almost a mania with some people, and young Madame de Staël, with her special susceptibility to generous enthusiasm, was doing something perfectly natural in writing her book, something which anyone of the innumerable feminine readers of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* would have done, if goodwill had been the only necessity for the production of it, something which would have been natural to almost any woman of her world and generation.

She is not conforming to her surroundings by writing this book ; not exploiting them, she is simply the natural expression of them.

* See Note. Appendix C.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

There has hitherto been no authorized panegyric of her great man, and she wants to supply the deficiency.*

It seems to her that an important gap needs filling. She believes in panegyrics. To her there is no shade of ridicule attached to them.

She even feels some pride in following the accepted tradition in this respect.

In her exordium, for there is one, she compares the slow elaboration of Jean-Jacques' thought to nothing less than the ordering of chaos and the creation of the world.

At the same time, there is an intimate bond between Madame de Staël and her subject.

Of course, we are not certain of it, but it seems very probable that Necker, who did not easily rid himself of objections to the whole race of women-writers, even when confronted by his overwhelming daughter, must have tried to dissuade her from undertaking any such task which might well be too much for her untried strength and expose her incapacity to mockery.

It is possible that this is what is referred to in a passage in the first preface which says :

“ Perhaps even those who have been kind enough to foretell future success for me will reproach me for prematurely attempting a task beyond even such power as I may hope to enjoy some day.”

Whatever the origin of this idea, Madame de Staël brushes it impatiently aside. “ How could one possibly consent,” she cries, “ *to put off the expression of urgent feeling to an indefinite future ?* ”

Madame Necker de Saussure discerns the nature of the urgent impulse. She writes on this question : “ Madame de Staël felt the need of opening out her own soul. The urgent impulse was less concerned with Rousseau than herself.”

But she deliberately chose Rousseau and not Voltaire. She was free to choose, and she choose

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

Rousseau because she felt that he was especially *her* subject; not so much in virtue of their common Swiss origin, (for enthusiasm for Switzerland burns very low in Madame de Staël for the moment), nor because she had inherited the cult from her family over and above the general admiration, but because she felt that they were sister souls.

Rousseau, who can sublimate his emotion in ideas without ever losing his way or contradicting himself, helped Madame de Staël to unravel her own soul as none other could have done.

That is why we can perceive very clearly from *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau* what Madame de Staël was in 1788, what she thought, what she felt, and what she might in all human probability become. From Madame Necker de Saussure, who affirms that in this work Madame de Staël "is already astonishingly herself," and Sainte-Beuve, who sees "presages" in it, all her future commentators, including Faguet and Sorel, are in agreement in letting us know that this work brings us to the brink of her maturity; Faguet estimating that "the *Lettres* already give us the measure of her powers," and Sorel that "it is an avowal, it is almost a programme for her own life." But Madame de Staël had already said all that there is to be said on this subject.

"Many celebrated writers," she says in the middle of her chapter on *Héloïse*, "have put the germ of all their future works into their first work.

"People begin by thinking of everything at once, praising everything in review, before submitting to a system, or following a route.

"In youth, thought is a tumultuous affair.

"*We probably have within us then all the ideas that we shall ever have*, but it is still chaos within us. As we range our ideas in order during the passing years, to the eyes of others we seem to have more of them than we had.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

“ Finally, we find ourselves able to dominate them, to bring them under the yoke of reason, and their power is thereby vastly increased.”

Is not this the history of her own mind ?

At any rate, it is obvious from the first that she loves ideas.

It looks as if she loved them for themselves, apart from any conclusions they might lead to.

She even seems to love ideas more than thought.

Her thought is complete, pre-existent, indestructible ; it is not very original, indeed, healthy and commonplace.

But her ideas are vivacious, graceful and well-made. There is coquetry in her mental processes. It is evidently impossible to her to state an idea without putting some of her own ideas into it. When she is simply in agreement, she throws it off with that flourish of the wrist which belongs to a past-master. But she generally manages not to be in agreement.

Then she bows very low indeed, like the most courtly duellist, in recognition of Jean-Jacque's facility for instantly absorbing “ the subtlest and most remote affinities or analogies.”

Two considerations bother her somewhat.

She knows that she is very young ; and she loves her antagonist.

She is almost timid in attack, at any rate, for her ; she is almost afraid of beating him only too well.

But the temptation is too much for her ; it is not an opportunity to throw away ; she must give herself the joy of combat with the great logician though the next minute she will throw her arms round his neck. There is already something more than the impertinent turn of wit which belongs to her rôle as a society woman under her exuberant joy in ideas.

Thought for her is not a destination, it is a point of departure.

Her ideas are made to defend this determination that she leaps off from, without giving us an idea how this determined thought was conceived.

She is already at her conclusion when she starts. It is categorical, has the clear definition of a doctrine, the unbending nature of a dogma.

With a certain elaboration in her manner of doing it, she rejects everything of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that is purely negative.

She agrees with him as to the original bent to virtue in human nature. But she wants to make out that man retains it.

Neither does she wish the natural curiosities which resulted in the foundation of society to be ungraciously denied. The thirst for knowledge is and ought to be an instinct not to be suppressed, she says; it is useless for a disillusioned philosopher to try and way-lay the seeker on the road by saying to him: "Don't go any further! I have been all the way, and I am coming back to tell you all that the journey is not worth while on any account whatsoever!"

Can we possibly imagine a condition of human affairs in which human seekers will satisfy their curiosity in "the experience of others?"

It is inconceivable to Madame de Staël, and to most of us. Where Jean-Jacques was wrong, or mistaken, was in seeking the fabulous Golden Age in the past, she thinks. He was right to go in quest of the Golden Age. But, why in the past? Why look for it where it could no longer be of any use? The Golden Age ought to be in the future. It is an aim and not a memory.

Very adroitly, with a perfidious logic which is very feminine, she invites the reader to admire "the subtlety with which Rousseau follows the progress of men's ideas."

In his discourse on the inequality of conditions, "what admiration he rouses for the first footsteps

of the human mind, and what amazement at the concatenation of circumstances which brought the human mind to take those steps.

“ See him trace the road of human thought, making, as he composes his story, an effort of intellectual imagination, of abstract creation, which far surpasses any composition, based on events and images, given us by any of the poets.”

This is, perhaps, not the mind of J. J. Rousseau, but it certainly is the mind of Madame de Staël. The past is all in flux towards the present ; the present is not standing still, but marching ; marching on to the future.

“ The thread of Ariadne leads on from the first steps to the last.”

That seems clear, certainly, if not proved.

The pessimism of the work seems eccentric to Madame de Staël. She feels that she need not insist much on that. Rousseau makes it so evident. But it is curious, and intensely interesting, to find that while condemning it as thought, she defends the inner genesis of it. She does not want to “ give away ” this generous soul by means of her own logic (which she believes unassailable), she does not want to deliver up his grandiose chimeras to the facile laughter of minds which are blindly and vulgarly rationalistic.

This pessimism, she explains, is only an extension of the usual melancholy of genius : unwarrantable, it is true, but understandable.

To Rousseau it was given “ to experience the anguish which his gifts (the gifts of genius) compelled him to experience to a greater extent than anyone before or since.”

Though just now she assailed his philosophy, she insists that this anguish, which is his excuse, is also a great glory.

To his inner feelings she accords all the rights

which she refused to his general philosophy, even the right to suicide. Genius, she says, is an exception to every rule, and it is by thus consulting the heart that it draws inspiration.

One is entitled to question the results, but not the means by which they are attained.

Only those who know how genius goes to work, how, in the case of genius, thought blooms out of emotion, have a right to specify the code by which genius is to be judged.

Who and what was Rousseau? A disillusioned idealist; a man who believed too implicitly in the goodness of man, and had been forced by man himself to recant his faith.

Up to the time of his disillusionment, he was an optimist, one who made the mistake of abandoning himself to an optimism of exaggerated sensitiveness and delicacy, little calculated for hard wear, instead of training it to robust resistance.

Quite carried away by her sympathy, Madame de Staël goes so far as to say that she is almost ready to believe with Jean-Jacques Rousseau "that one cannot long contemplate the destinies of man without sinking into melancholy."

Another step and she will be flatly contradicting her own philosophy.

But this is a momentary effect of contagion, and we must not exaggerate the importance of it. But the paradox is strange, nevertheless.

She goes so far as to approve of suicide*; and she is continually sympathising with melancholy and disillusionment.

* Faguet, speaking of her "rage against suicide which inspired a separate work on the subject in her youth, and made her alter the climax in *Delphine*," is rather too eager to prove his Madame de Staël a perfectly lucid person and all of a piece. The eminent critic seems to have deduced her anger at the idea of suicide from her faith in progress. It is tiresome for him that the said "rage" never existed, but it never did. As for the book against suicide, written in her youth, it never was in existence either.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Thus we find her condemning Rousseau's thought and upholding the emotions which inspired it. Or we may put it another way: Rousseau's thought was emotionally, but not intellectually, valuable to her.

Or we may put it still another way: she feels, as Rousseau does, but thinks otherwise.

And yet again, she wishes that thought and emotion should not be separated, and in Rousseau they are not separated. She defends this peculiarity of Rousseau's and thus she is led to make a declaration of principle on this important subject, which is none the less precise for being implicit.

It is a question of nothing less than the conception of reason.

She despised those "mediocre minds" which "delight in confronting the errors which may spring up in the development of original thought by a genius, with the brief triumph of their commonplace though incontestable ideas."

Notice that she is not allowing her own ideas to triumph over the grandiose errors of the master.

She is engaged in defending the whole nature of Rousseau's mental processes: reason, as he understood it.

Jean-Jacques believed that ecstasy is the only road to the eternal verities.

Madame de Staël confirmed it with all the power that was in her. "To find truth," she says, "you have only to follow the impulse from your soul."

She prefers the exaltation, even the delirium, of genius to the cold logic which unlocks a bloodless heart.

She goes one better than that. See her definition of genius: "*This particular alliance of thought and emotion is precisely what genius is: it cannot exist in any other form.*"

The highest form of reason is, so to speak, not

reason in its purest unmixed form. It is reason which has been made supple, has been illuminated, has been freed for *flight* by deep and passionate emotion. And, far from seeking to establish a tyranny over emotion, in emotion it acknowledges the source from which it sprang.

This is evidently the basis of the sympathy between Rousseau and Madame de Staël, and it explains why she glides so lightly over the surface of his systems. She found the whole explanation in the man's personality; and that sufficed for her. But she explains too much by it.

She is right enough as to his mental processes; but she is going too far when she congratulates Jean-Jacques on the eloquence of his style. "Jean-Jacques' style," she says, "seems like the very voice of his soul, communicating to mankind the great truths with which it is laden," and "it plays on the soul as on an instrument."

That is the secret of style, and eloquence is the vehicle of reason.

Thereupon she flies off to imagine that the very crown of Rousseau's literary career would have been to harangue the delegates of the nation at the coming assembly of the States General. Utterly losing her bearings for the moment, she includes the solitary dreamer in her programme.

"What an inspiration for talent is the hope of being useful! What a different outlook when thought, instead of being perpetually forced back upon itself, can look forward to an aim and *convert itself into an action*.

"Such happiness would repay the troubles of a lifetime. Such a man would lose *himself* in a fruition of his whole being which put him in communion with humanity. Arise, O Rousseau! Rise up from your ashes! . . . etc."

This is the end of ends, the final achievement,

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

the apotheosis which Madame de Staël imagines for Rousseau : to become a member of Necker's "*claque*."

The gesture has significance, and firstly because of its unconsciousness of impertinence.

In spite of her undeniable piety as Rousseau's commentator, Madame de Staël does not journey into the past to find the precious traces of genius : she expects them to come to her in the present, and wants to utilise them in her rôle of commentator of her father's career.

At the same time, she is perfectly aware that, even dead, Rousseau does not lend himself to her scheme ; there are difficulties.

As she thinks over the perpetual inaction of Rousseau's life, her admiration is inevitably tinged with disdainful pity.

Surely he is too much like one of those placid savages who sit on the banks of the Orinoco watching the water flow by, and consider their time very well spent ! She is too intelligent not to understand the necessity for these solitary reveries, and too much a woman not to be seized with maternal solicitude at the thought of the inspired man " walking through life like a blind man," one " who must be led like a child and listened to as an oracle."

In theory she accepts the peculiarity of those " whose lips are touched," who exist to show forth the might of the gods on high ; generally the simplest of men.

Nevertheless, it is just there that Rousseau escapes her. She can tolerate his errors of thought better than his laziness.

She can understand the pessimism of the acutely sensitive philosopher better than the egoism of the artist. The idle, unresisting sensuality of the artist is utterly lacking in her, and so is the capacity for dethroning reason, for abandonment to sensation.

She is not a pagan. She has ardour and warm

MADAME DE STAËL

blood, but her senses and her mind never become disconnected.

The beauty of a sunset sky does not escape her, but it has a message to her soul, a message "of virtue, hope, and kindliness." That is to say, a message in which sentiment, reason, and the senses are all jumbled together with a result which is vaguely moral.

Even certain airs in music are "connected with the condition of the soul" for her.

Reason always intervenes and interprets.

Beauty makes no more than a passing appeal to her senses and becomes dissolved in ideas.

One would really say that the description of fine scenery pleases her better than the scenery itself. She delights at a distance through the mediation of words, in that Swiss scenery which is so sympathetic a setting "for great passions." "Those piercing rocks which threaten the sky," "those boundless lakes," "those boiling torrents."

And when she is in Switzerland she is bored to death, and hardly troubles to look out of the window.

As for solitude, there is a fashion for it, but it is a fashion which she is not going to follow!

And she is practically sure that all Jean-Jacques' craziness was due to an excess of contemplative solitude.

She judges by herself; alone in the bosom of Nature, she finds herself utterly unemployed, with all her vibrating intelligence thrown back upon itself to a degree which completely upsets her nerves so that only a good hour's incessant chatter will restore her equanimity. It must be understood that Madame de Staël does not emphasise the points of difference between herself and her idol. Only she cannot help seeing, and letting others see, that they are there. And then, too, the points of divergence are no more remarkable than the points of sympathetic contact.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

These, too, are fundamental. She is ready to be conciliatory on everything which does not concern doctrines and intellectual principles.

She does not drop too heavily upon the apologist for the past, although this attitude perturbs her. But she refuses to compromise on the question of the character which explains and determines it.

She would have liked to remould Rousseau, making him more useful, more active, and as this is impossible, she simply tries to make him useful in spite of himself by draping him in a political garment hung with the placards of 1788.

As in her case, faith in human progress is spontaneous, is the transposition of the authentic gesture of her nature into the domain of thought, so in Rousseau's case the pessimism of his convictions is to be traced back, to the relative egoism, the unalterable calibre of his personality.

Admitting that for him character and mind are one, Madame de Staël does not pause before the mind, but presses on to the inmost fortress, the heart. That is her point of attack.

In the name of emotion she calls on him to bestir himself to act.

Here we have the essence of them both : emotion is the driving force of mind in both, but it leads Madame de Staël into action, while Rousseau remains in contemplation always.

In this comparison of pupil with master by the pupil, the only quality she was obliged to leave in the background, more or less, is her own ability as a woman of the world.

In her chapter on *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, however, she finds means of letting us know that she has graduated in wit and social knowledge in the capital, and that she is a mistress of both.

She writes : " Claire's wit seems to me to lack grace, and its taste is not to be depended on. To

attain perfection in this direction you must have acquired in *Paris* that sort of instinct which instantly rejects without reasoning about it, anything that the severest and subtlest examiner would not pass.

"You may judge whether a feeling is genuine, or an opinion just at the tribunal of yourself, but you must have long experience of society life to be able to judge beforehand how a joke will be received."

It was this sort of thing which exasperated Madame de Staël's Swiss friends.

One can hardly perceive the faint shade of this feeling in the warm colours with which she paints the master; but it is there.

Madame de Staël is not sorry that she is more witty than Rousseau.

She notes that there is "something republican" in his style, which now soars above and now plunges below the sublime. He does not sufficiently understand that terms of speech exist on different levels, that there are different ranks even among words."

Rational and sentimental, a woman of mind and a woman of action, an optimist in public, a pessimist in private . . . do not these various contradictions make a sufficiently complicated creature of so young a woman?

Now add a light coating of snobbishness; a transparent varnish, painted all over her and not obscuring the more important qualities. And yet again the somewhat theatrical ways of the Germaine of the diary, which are persisting still.

We cannot help seeing that this young personage is curiously poised in life in a leaning attitude; she is leaning eagerly forward, stretching out to the future; she is quite as much a movement as a woman.

Such was Madame de Staël on the threshold of her life, thirsting for action . . . and for happiness. It remains for us to watch her at work, wrestling with reality, ripening and meeting disillusionment.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

The years 1786 and 1787 had not been unhappy ones. In those early days the sensation of freedom acquired and *prestige* won, was enough to bear her up through anything.

And then she had her baby.

She does not definitely come into collision with the moral problem of her marriage until 1788, at a time when she was just finishing the *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau*.

In this problem Madame de Staël's case seems a tragic one.

She is fighting her way in a blind alley ; she hesitates between two irreconcilable and indispensable forms of happiness.

Her femininity is quite undeniable.

Madame Necker de Saussure, who first makes her acquaintance about this time, was rather shocked at the very mild enthusiasm with which her cousin, in her opinion, attended to her maternal duties.

But although there is only one allusion in the *Lettres* to this infant daughter, the rest of Madame de Staël's life, in which care for her children's future played so prominent a part, formally forbids any estimation of her as a neuter quantity, half man, half woman.

On the contrary, her observations on *Emile*, in the *Lettres sur J. J. Rousseau*, point to an inverse conclusion.

It becomes evident that the superiority of her abilities, far from making her less a woman, makes her more a woman, feminine to excess ; given to exaltation on the subject of womanly virtues : emotional sensibility, tenderness, loving submissiveness ; and it also makes her too exacting in the quest for happiness.

Happiness in marriage . . . she told herself this in advance . . . is " an earthly paradise."

This is no mere phrase to her.

MADAME DE STAËL

Later on it surges up again and again as a sort of refrain : it is actually a claim which she makes on life.

She wants this happiness to be a peaceful idyll ; even more of an idyll than the Necker marriage.

She wants it to supply a need of peace and consolation ; the same need that she attributes to Jean-Jacques, to supply also a craving for constant and assured sympathy, "so that I may not be driven in upon myself." This dread is a form of fatigue felt by those agitating personalities who are actually capable of fatiguing *themselves*, and are always longing "to lose themselves in another being."

But her youth craved love, and we have already been shewn what sort of love it craved.

Not the placid affection which sustains the conjugal placidity of the typical married pair, but ecstasy, ecstasy which is to be permanent and kept alive at the same intensity by an unending series of climaxes ; which create alternately "a divine sadness" and "glorious abandonment."

From this passion which means sacrifice as well as supreme triumph in the woman, all the other virtues ought to spring. "It prepares the soul for virtue," sometimes "it creates those virtues which are prescribed by religion and morality."

The man's part, it seems, is to be more or less a passive one : he allows himself to be adored. But love is woman's whole existence. The fate of the passion lies in the woman's hands."

We can easily perceive that this is her own problem and that her husband counts for nothing in it. She is unhappy, so unhappy.

Towards the end of her life she wrote :

"In an unhappy marriage there is a ruthless power of inflicting pain which surpasses every other pain in the world."

Her anguish breaks out on every other page of the *Letters sur J. J. Rousseau* :

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

“How happy that being who has never had to respond, in relations, not springing from the affections ; who has never had to submit except gladly out of love ; and from whom no one but the authors of that being ever had the right to claim a right which cannot be yielded willingly from the heart’s deep tenderness.”

“But how happy Emile was in being preserved from combat with self, and preserved from cruel situations in which society is in direct opposition to nature.”

“Who, without withering pain, can lose the unthinking kindness of early youth, the laughing hopes, the sweet trustfulness, the complete confidence in life of those days ?

“Where is the sensitive soul which can close up its heart and see all the colours of imagination turn to drab, without immense regret ? ”

There is no denying that there is a crisis here.

The smiling hopes of happy young Germaine are already beginning to droop ; her kind heart is no longer blind, her complete confidence in life is already shaken.

We certainly ought to be on our guard when faced with this sensibility which takes pleasure in the spectacle of its own grief, and enjoys the very things which stir its tears.

We notice a false note in Madame de Staël’s description of her visit to Jean-Jacques’ tomb.

“I did not scatter flowers on this sad tomb ; I stood beside it for a long time with tears in my eyes ; I moved away from it in silence, but unable to withdraw myself from the memories it had called up.

“Oh, you, who are happy in this world, do not come here to insult his shade !

“Leave to misfortune one refuge where it is not pursued by the spectacle of joy ! ”

We must draw our own conclusions from this. This young woman’s griefs are seldom quite free from pose.

MADAME DE STAËL

Her suffering has not the instinct to hide, of real suffering; on the contrary, she is consoled if she feels that she is observed.

That, however, does not prevent the feeling itself from being deep and sincere.

She had given full consent to her marriage; she had even chosen to embark on it.

But she had consented with her mind on anything but the part that a wife plays in a marriage; she had consented, thinking of her father and his career, thinking of the charming prospect of a permanent establishment in Paris, thinking of escape from the meddlesome supervision of her mother. The accessories of marriage had fascinated her.

She had married de Staël in order to extend her sphere of action, bringing to the marriage certainly a less cynical outlook than her husband did, though not quite to be exempted from cynicism, herself.

No doubt the first disillusionment was forced on her by the birth of her child, a symbol of reality which there was no getting away from; of reality in a union which she would rather have considered a mere matter of appearances.

But "little de Staël" is never to count again; his wife sees to that.

From that time forward she treated him simply as a pawn at the service of her father; she supervised his duties as ambassador, even going to the length of dictating his dispatches, to such good purpose that one fine day he found himself dismissed, for having followed his wife's opinion instead of his king's during the first years of the Revolution.

There is no doubt that he was a poor creature,* who had been pushed into his position entirely by influence; quite capable of executing Gustave III.'s little commissions in Paris, of picking up engravings and engaging dancers for him.

He would have done better to hire out his mediocre

* See Note. Appendix C.

talents at the little Court of some German prince, where he was not so certain to be ousted in competition.

He could never take root in Paris, and had no moral support but his vanity and his insignificance. The great disaster of his career was his marriage to a woman who looked down on him.

At the very moment when, having sown his wild oats, he was disposed to settle down into domesticity, to avoid getting into debt (his only vice) and to get as comfortably stout as he chose at the side of his life-companion as the years rolled comfortably by, just at this turning-point in his career, she broke with him for good, and sent him packing.

In 1789 she was treating him publicly as if he had no say at all in the matter of her conduct, and this attitude was not affected, but most genuine.

Gouverneur Morris once observed to Madame de Staël that her husband "was madly in love with her," which was not far from the truth from the time that she would have nothing more to do with him.

She answered "that she knew it only too well, and that it was a source of distress to her."

Now Gouverneur Morris was a mere acquaintance whom she was bent on making useful to her father, and to whom she was in no way obliged to make confidences of this kind. Nevertheless, she did make them, and in English, so that her husband should not understand, because he was present at dinner when this conversation took place.

In justice to de Staël, he must be exonerated in this affair. He was no doubt an instrument of fate; but he went through a pretty bad experience.

But long after Madame de Staël had ceased to take her husband seriously, she remained very serious indeed about marriage as an institution. De Staël was nothing to her, but marriage was still practically sacred in her eyes.

MADAME DE STAËL

That was a tradition, almost an instinct, of her family in her.

She does not torment herself on the question of whether or no she would betray her husband if temptation were sufficiently strong.

That was never her problem.

If need be, she would simply go her own way to satisfy the pressing cravings of such an individuality as hers.

But marriage? Can she trample under foot her own exquisite dream of the ideal union indispensable to happiness?

And happiness? Would she lose it for ever if she stifled the voice of her conscience, or would she lose it for ever by not seizing it when it seemed to offer itself in a new shape? *

Following her usual custom, she works out her problem on paper; and it is Jean-Jacques who helps her.

Rousseau "believes in love," which he sees as she sees it, both "passionate and serene," an ideal aspiration, eternally unsatisfied.

Rousseau was one of those men who burst into exaltation over anything they have not got. A man "who was only impassioned over illusions." This was also her case.

When reading *La Nouvelle Héloïse* she felt so much enthusiasm that she could never mention the subject without a fresh outburst of this enthusiasm.

She imposed on herself the duty of considering it "as if her heart was already an old one," for fear that her enthusiasm should be attributed more to the state of her own mind than to the power of the author.

When she closed the book she felt as if an incident in her own life had been closed. "Oh, how sad it is to finish a book which is as interesting as something in one's own life!" She had said the same thing

* See Note. Appendix C.

about *Clarisse*, and, indeed, she needed very little encouragement for the feat of jumping bodily into the skin of any heroine who was "sensitive and good, unhappy and passionate," and the heroines of her day were generally of that type.

But in the case of *Héloïse* she feels that the book might have been written expressly to fit her case; the situation is so strikingly like her own.

La Nouvelle Héloïse, she tells us, is not a trick of the imagination, or simply a picture of the times; "it is a great moral problem set in action and turned into drama."

It is moral because it deals with love, and for that reason it must specially interest women; indeed, "it was written for them."

It is a study of the workings of a woman's conscience.

Saint-Preux is only introduced to give some sort of form to the problem which is thus rendered less abstract, more striking.

After a few amiable words about him, Madame de Staël puts him on one side. She then attacks the essence of the book straight away.

The case of conscience and the great moral problem are presented as follows:—

"He has given us the case of a woman married against her will, feeling nothing but respect for her husband, carrying always in her heart a joy apart from him; love for another man.

"Her whole life is spent far from the whirlpool of society which might have brought forgetfulness of both husband and lover: society which prevents any real thought or feeling from gaining dominion over *us*" (the editor of 1820 might have struck out that *us*), "which simply extinguishes great passion in the multiplicity of small things, and reduces us to calmness through confusions and repose by means of incessant tumult" . . . (notice how she under-

MADAME DE STAËL

lines for herself the points of contrast between her case and Julie's).

"Julie passes her life in absolute seclusion, alone in the country with M. de Wolmar, close to Nature, tuned up by Nature to an appreciation of all her moods and inspirations.

"Rousseau shews us Julie under these conditions, making her own happiness out of her own goodness; happy in her plans for her children's upbringing, happy in the effect of her good example on those around her, happy in the consolation of her faith in God.

"This is a different happiness from that which I described just now" (she had just been dwelling on the extraordinary bliss of a really happy marriage); "there is melancholy in it, and one may very well shed tears over it! But it is really made for fleeting lives like our own. We can leave it when we must without any shattering regret.

"It is a happiness of habit and custom, and we may feel that it is truly our own, unspoilt by any fear or any reflection; *in fact, it is the happiness in which the souls of the pious find all the delights which love holds out to others*; it is the presentment of this condition of mind and soul which makes this story a moral one. . . ."

Certainly! We can see quite well what is happening. Making use of the story, Madame de Staël is preaching to herself just as she used to preach to herself in *Sophie* and *The Drawbacks to Life in Paris*. It is a little sermon on resignation to unhappiness, and respect for the holy estate of matrimony. How can anyone say that such a book is not a moral one?

Look at the man's profound respect for conjugal affection!

Look at his reverence for the bond which is our destiny!

How anxious he is to prove that our true happiness lies there, even the happiness of those who have known delights elsewhere.

Notice, she says, that this is not the sermon of a professional preacher. This man who preaches virtue and resignation to unhappily married women is himself a victim of passion.

"Is he a stranger to passions? Is their empire unknown to him? Has he not the right to speak to passionate souls teaching them what sacrifices belong inevitably to the might of passion?"

"When Rousseau shews us that Julie, the most passionate of women, has been able to find happiness in doing her duty up to the very end of her life . . . was he not right to speak?"

She is beginning to define the great moral problem precisely. The case of Julie is especially applicable to those women who are the *élite* of passion. But she becomes still more definite.

It had been said that this would be a bad book for unmarried girls.

Rousseau himself had advised that it should be withheld from them.

But is that really the important point? For girls before marriage have no moral responsibility, she says.

"It is our custom to educate young girls in convents. There is no fear that this novel would put them against a marriage of convenience. What choice have they? Everything in their education tends to suppress emotional liberty. The ambition and stability of character of their parents have undertaken all responsibility for them."

But that does not seem the real problem to her. Take the same girl two or three years after marriage with a man who does not interest her.

This disillusioned young woman is the person to beware of! She is in one sense her own mistress

MADAME DE STAËL

now ; she is free, though in bondage ! This is the time to supervise her choice of books !

What usually happens in a case like this ?

“ Acting on the bizarre principles in use, men wait until she is married to make love to her !

“ The whole atmosphere in which she lives has been changed.

“ Everybody scoffs and jokes about the things they used to hold up as the objects of her deepest reverence ! ”

“ This is the moment when she ought to read *Héloïse* ” ; and Madame de Staël tells us why :

“ By reading the letters of Saint-Preux, they will find out how far their admirers are from really loving them ! They will realise how sacred the marriage-bond is. They will appreciate the true importance of duties which may seem trivial, and what happiness may be derived from the performance of them *even when they are entirely devoid of the charm of any emotion.* ”

Those are the pros ; and here are the cons.

One of the letters in *Héloïse* touched Madame de Staël “ inexpressibly.” It is that which describes Julie’s death. She writes :

“ Perhaps it is not as touching as I thought, but often a word responding to our very heart’s core, a situation calling up memories and chimeras of our own, gives us the illusion that the author is the cause of this effect of his work : but Julie confessing to Saint-Preux that she has never conquered her love for him, Julie, whom I considered cured, shewing me a heart more deeply wounded than ever, giving evidence of the happiness of relaxation after intolerable strain, and of the abandonment which Death authorizes and then cuts short ; Julie, uttering those sombre words, ‘ Good-bye, Good-bye, for ever,’ with an emotion which was meant to be bliss in her life, all this crowned with the inevitability of Death which

gives all speech at such a moment so solemn and genuine a character" (in her diary Germaine used to write: "so tremendous a note of truth") "crowned with that dominating idea of complete supreme serenity . . . all this . . . every word of the letter fills my soul with the most poignant emotion."

Up to this point the demonstration, personal as it is, will hold water.

The reader will agree that such a work, Madame de Staël's own case in the abstract, would have a good moral effect. And as long as the objective truth and the subjective application of it run side by side without colliding with each other, we can hardly distinguish one from the other.

But suddenly one word too much knocks down the whole edifice of the argument for the moral, revealing to us that it is only a personal impression that we are dealing with, which has endeavoured to be something that it never was, or rather, has no idea what it really is.

Julie, who gives up her whole being to her lover once more on her death-bed, is anything you like, but she is not a moral person.

If she is that, then she was not so when she sacrificed herself to her husband.

You can take your choice between the two moralities: that of the individual, or of society, but you cannot have them both. Madame de Staël wants to have them both at once, or alternately; the happiness which is found nowhere outside marriage and the tragic, unconquerable passions of unauthorized love.

She is right in believing that Jean-Jacques attempts this impossible combination in this book, and that is why she finds in it a unique satisfaction for herself, a moral which satisfies by turns the special pressing cravings of her very special individuality. And that is why her attempt to prove *La Nouvelle Héloïse*

MADAME DE STAËL

a useful moral lesson for all, only succeeds in revealing the special condition of her own soul at that time.

Her unconsciousness and artlessness are such that she touches up several details in order to make Julie still more like herself in spite of the facts.

She considers that Julie was too passionate and went too far before marriage, while, after marriage, she is too tame.

Madame de Staël could have wished that Julie were "only guilty through her heart."

She cannot reconcile herself to that seduction before marriage. It shews a want of tact in Jean-Jacques, who, obviously, did not know how the great world behaves.

And then it lends an ambiguous tinge of repentance to Julie's attitude, which confuses the issues.

By way of retaliation, Julie's resignation after marriage is too complete. She really seems almost happy! The moral lesson would have been more overwhelming "if Julie had offered us for all time, not as the ancients have it, the spectacle of virtue at grips with misfortune, *but virtue wrestling with passion which is still more terrible. . . .*"

Another thing which wounds her is Julie's power of dissimulation. No doubt she was on the horns of a dilemma.

Fortunately, even Rousseau saw that Julie must be relieved of the responsibility of carrying on this deception, and he charges Claire "with the duty of dissuading Julie from confessing to M. de Wolmar, so that Julie is able to keep all the charm of her passion sweet, and seems rather to have been managed on this point than to be capable of calculated deceit."

To Madame de Staël, Julie seems too much inclined to mount a rostrum, especially for a person who has her own reason for a penitent attitude, on a lower level. "Her continual sermons to Saint-Preux are out of place."

She does not understand how far the beloved man is above all moral considerations. What is worse—and Madame de Staël is quite right here—by scolding her lover she loses her own rights to indulgence. “The excess of their passion was its excuse, and only by insisting on its overwhelming violence could she diminish the immorality into which that love had led them.”

Not only did the thinker lead the novelist astray when he borrowed Julie’s pen to express his ideas, but being a man he was quite unable to make use of certain delicacies of feminine tact which a woman would have made use of. “The proprieties, the modesty of even a guilty woman are lacking in several of the letters.”

Madame de Staël might have added that Julie, the lecturer, is rather too mannish for the rest of her character. To quote Taine, who puts it very well: “She gives us dissertations, twenty pages long, on subjects as various as duelling, love, and duty, displaying logic, talent and phraseology which would do honour to a professor of moral science.”

This ill-accords with the ideals of Rousseau, an avowed enemy of the learned woman.

Did he not declare to someone in this very book, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, “that unless a woman was five and a half feet high, and had a bass voice and a beard, she had better keep out of the masculine pose.”*

Strange to say, Madame de Staël does not press her point any further.

On the contrary, if we turn to her observations on the passages in *Emile*, which treat of Sophie’s education, we shall see that she hesitates and is inclined to parley and come to terms.

She does not approve of a preaching Julie, nor does she admire a wholly domestic Sophie:

“In countries where public opinion is the only power which shakes off tyranny, the applause and

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

support of women form one more motive for rivalry in men, which it is important to preserve."

Realizing that here she is almost in opposition to herself, she does not dwell on the subject, but cuts it short by observing that since Jean-Jacques believes in love, *she has his support*. But there is further support needed, for, to tell the truth, Rousseau has not altogether understood Madame de Staël's peculiar case.

Before giving up the attempt, she tries to drag a small concession from him on this point at any rate: "though he may deny that women are ever endowed with the mighty power of mind, and extraordinary faculty for concentration which belongs to genius, for their weaker nervous systems are in opposition, and their minds are so incessantly slaves to their hearts" (a precious scrap of revelation that) "... at least, do not let him accuse them of incapacity to portray the passion of love."

The result of all this retouching is the substitution of Madame de Staël for Julie by degrees. But the exchange made, the moral of the book is quite as ambiguous as ever.

The problem is fought out to a finish; and it is certainly Madame de Staël's problem.

But she does not seem to have drawn any principle of guidance for her own conduct from it; it does not help her to solve the problem of her own conscience.

She cannot approve of a Julie who can stoop to give herself before marriage.

But what then?

Will she rank herself with the "good ones" who are content with happiness, which is really not happiness, because they do not regret it if they lose it; or does she claim "the bliss which love holds out to the others?"

Which is going to win, love or marriage?

Enigma! She slips away from a decision. That is to say, she leaves it to destiny.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORM, 1789-1792

At the very moment that life begins to teach this spoilt child that even involuntary impertinence has a long price, and that a witty tongue is not a gift which sustains friendships, at the very moment, too, when the King of Sweden's correspondent (her thirst for gaieties quenched) admits to a feeling of satiety in her social whirl, events themselves undertake to create a diversion.

Already in the budgets to Sweden of 1786 and 1787 we are able to perceive the first pulsations of that wider life, the sphere of the "citizeness," that she neither could nor would suppress in herself. It was beyond her strength to do so.

In spite of the definite intention to conform to the necessary official tone, she fastens eagerly on anything in this purposeless existence which is out of the common and appeals to the power of the mind.

She has a total lack of comprehension of the static or gyrating existence of a courtier; she becomes more and more scornful and amused at the spectacle.

A whole chapter of Court life is summed up for her in the tactics of the duc de Fleury at Fontainebleau, who would sit in the front of the box if he was told the play was going to be a bad one, so that to sleep through it was a proof of good taste, while he would take a seat in the background and sleep out of sight, if he were told that the piece was a good one.

Madame de Staël was certainly more at home in Paris, where the public applauded the plays which were hissed at Versailles, out of pure "cussedness."

Just at that time the case of the three rakes was

MADAME DE STAËL

being discussed everywhere, in the *salons* and by the man in the street. Madame de Staël relates it to Gustave III., adding comments of her own which clearly separates her attitude to the coming Revolution from that of the *jeunesse dorée*, who are determined to enjoy both the advantages of patrician blood and of plebeian philosophy. She writes :

“A thousand deaths on the battle-field do not revolt us as one case of injustice does.

“The criminal law of France often leads the judge into error, and it is devoutly to be wished that public opinion will enforce changes in it.

“Conversation in society is no longer unprofitable since public opinion is formed and declared in that way. Words have become actions.”

This is her own part in the matter foreseen. Her task is planned out.

With regard to warrants for arrest without formulated accusation—another reference to facts of the moment—she reminds this king who was soon to fall by the hand of an assassin, that no king lasts for ever, that ministers come and go, and that it would be advisable, surely, to base justice on something more dependable than the virtue of particular persons.

Another time she is listening to a man who has served a term of imprisonment in the Bastille, who recounts the misery of the long monotonous nights and days, and plays in the interludes of his story on a pipe fashioned from an elder-tree wand. He makes her weep and shudder as he evokes the memories of a suffering which she considers the most atrocious that human cruelty can devise.

Still, this is only a prelude, in which Madame de Staël is joining in a chorus, her voice being one of the faintest in the choir, so far.

But the current bearing her on is already a strong one : the most diverse minds are in the stream before her, joining in a strange anonymous movement. It

really seems as if events had taken upon themselves to direct men.

Madame de Staël submits, like all the rest, really believing that these events could be guided to a satisfactory finish.

In the middle of 1787 she suffered a serious reverse : Necker's exile was coincident with nearly the whole period of her first pregnancy.

She was not heard of for a whole year until her father was recalled as Controller General in 1788. At the end of 1788 the die was cast.

She recognised that the Court was the enemy. She turned to the public and launched her veiled appeal to it in the *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

Fragile and delicate, not really recovered from her collapse in 1785, Madame Necker was completely eclipsed in this formidable explosion of personality and energy, and seeing in it the consummation of the alliance of father and daughter, which she had always been trying to ward off, she sank into a premature old age, complaining that in this world "the old age of women . . . is only bearable . . . on condition that they do not take up any room, do not make any noise, do not demand any service, on condition that they render all the service that is expected of them, and actually have no existence except for the good of others."

The movement of the stream had indeed become accelerated, and the different eddies were now distinguishable.

On the 4th May, 1789, twelve hundred deputies of France (among which the members of the third party were to be remarked by their black coats and cocksure appearance) went in procession to the church of Versailles to hear Mass on the eve of the opening of the States General.

In the month of June the States General became the National Assembly.

MADAME DE STAËL

A few weeks later Necker received the King's command to leave France at once without any demonstration, and he set out for Brussels, followed by his daughter, on the 13th July. On the 13th and 14th of July the Revolution exploded in Paris, and the destruction of the Bastille took place. Necker was recalled. It was the zenith of the Swiss banker's career: "the last prosperous day of my life," says Madame de Staël.

Surging round the Hôtel de Ville, packed into the windows and swarming on the roofs, was an enormous crowd assembled to acclaim the victim of the Court, the "just man" Necker, who stepped out on to the balcony to proclaim peace in the ranks of all Frenchmen, with Madame de Staël almost fainting with joy, at his side.

That very evening Mirabeau, moving about among the sub-divisions of the parties, succeeded in extinguishing the flame of enthusiasm: and before long, under the very eyes of Madame de Staël, watching and listening in the gallery of the *Salle du Jeu de Paume*, this Cataline, quietly and without haste or vehemence, achieved the ruin of her Cicero, managing at the same time to subjugate and fascinate her by an eloquence to which she was compelled to render homage. For ideas had become more important than persons. Madame de Staël, alternately inflamed by ecstasy and anguish, leant breathlessly over the twelve hundred arbiters of the fate of France, burning with philosophical ardour as she watched the old abuses crumbling to dust, yet seized with unconquerable doubt before the edifice of words which was destined to be the new basis of a new nation.

It was a moment unique in Time.

Even the bloody days of the 5th and 6th of October did not suffice to break the spell; nor the lugubrious re-entry of royalty escorted by a multitude intoxicated with carnage, whose ferocity was contrasted

with the mild sunny tranquillity of a mellow autumn day.

Nor was the spell broken by the deviations from justice of the new legislature, which was beginning to sacrifice liberty to the phantom of an impossible equality, and was sinking gradually into Jacobinism. It was a curiously complex charm, more complex than Madame de Staël knew herself, for did not Talleyrand fall under its sway to no less a degree than herself, and for quite different reasons ?

Perhaps, at bottom, this charm consisted in the confusion of principles, in the liberation of the various egoisms which were brought into collision in this universal streaming forward, in which every talent saw a chance of developing itself into a career.

However that may be, Madame de Staël was fully under its influence, even after an interval of twenty years.

She pauses a moment, in her relation of the events of the Revolution, to tell the foreigners who flocked to Paris when the Napoleonic menace was at length laid low, that the French society of the moment, which they appeared to admire, was nothing to that of twenty years before.

“ Foreigners can have no idea of the much vaunted charm and brilliancy of Paris society if they have not been in France for twenty years.

“ I can truthfully affirm that society has never been so brilliant and so serious altogether, as it was during the first three or four years of the Revolution, counting from 1788 to the end of 1791.”*

In the eyes of Madame de Staël the epithets, *brilliant and serious*, distinguished French society of this period from all that preceded or came after it.

It was brilliant enough before the destruction of the Bastille, but, existing in idleness, it was also superficial.

Serious, it certainly was, during the fifteen years

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

of Napoleon's domination, but too serious, with a seriousness which was calculated.

Now in 1788 and the years immediately preceding the Terror, "the power of liberty" joins forces "with breeding, with aristocracy."

And this power and this breeding were united in the same persons : either it was some man of the third party, whose abilities had raised him above his class, or a nobleman more concerned with his talents than his privileges.

These people constituted an elect body of intelligence and it was a thousand pities that by some unqualifiable misfortune, it was not entrusted with the government of France.

Madame de Staël's obvious rôle was to be the mother and adviser of the elect, to try and increase the number of them (by bringing together the cleverest men of opposite convictions at her dinners) and to launch the most important questions boldly in her *salon*.

Women thus had a part in the destinies of the nation, and it was no negligible part.

"All conversation at their houses was directed by them . . . the discussions on public affairs were toned down by their tact and were enlivened with a great deal of wit and merriment."

Never had France been so brilliant with wit and mind ; it was the last spurt of a flame that was dying down :

"It was the last time, *and in some ways the first*, that society in Paris was able to give a full display of the communion of great minds with one another ; the noblest pleasure which human nature may enjoy."

And for the third time in Chapter XVII. of her *Considerations*, when she is dealing with Society in Paris at the time of the Constituent Assembly, the same refrain of infinite regret surges up :

"Anyone who lived through those days will admit

that there has never been so much vitality, mind and wit gathered together before or since."

Madame de Staël was the life and soul of it, intoxicated by all this political eloquence (which Gouverneur Morris rejoices over in his letters to Washington), this brilliant conversation, which she felt to be as valuable to the nation as it was delightful to herself, when her father resigned for the third and last time, and retired to Coppet on the 8th September, 1790, to meditate in peace over the strange freaks of fortune.

He had been arrested on the road to Coppet, and it was necessary for his daughter to intervene before he was allowed to proceed on his way.

Her letter to the President of the Assembly, instinct with suppressed indignation, is curiously interesting to read.

Only a fortnight before this event Madame de Staël had given birth to a son.

She had been prepared for her father's resignation, but this last shock of discovering the colossal ingratitude of the nation, now hurling insults at its fallen idol, struck her a knock-down blow.

Writing with a hand which trembled with rage and physical weakness, she requested "that the Assembly would be so good as to reconsider the matter of her father's arrest that very morning."

She insisted that the state of his health would admit of no delay.

"That is the only consideration that I put forward."

From this very moderation we can gauge the depth and painfulness of the feeling which moved her.

It is the crumbling of a whole world for her; the tearing of a great gash in the sky-blue veils, which had hung round her youth in sheltering folds.

Madame de Staël was mistaken when she included the years between 1788 and 1791 as one solid block of experience in her life.

After this crushing disillusion she was no longer the

MADAME DE STAËL

privileged favourite of fortune, reaching out with all her might to embrace life ; she was a woman who had known misfortune, and was unafraid, though warned now what to expect.*

For a moment, perhaps, she lost her bearings.

She hastened to Coppet to join her father.

During this, the first phase of her public life, besides the *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* she had only written the tragedy of *Montmorency* and the *Éloge* of her friend Guibert who died in May, 1790.

Neither of these works was then published.

But the *Éloge* was printed by the editor of 1821 and turns out to be documentary confirmation of much that occurred before the writing of *Lettres sur Jean Jacques Rousseau*, besides being the logical continuation of that work.

In this defence of a character whose faults were plainly visible to Madame de Staël, there is a generosity and loyalty in friendship for which she must receive due honour, even if examples of this virtue in the good lady of Coppet had been less numerous and striking than they are.

This work lets us in for a strong dose of that "pathos overdone," to which all students of Madame de Staël rapidly become accustomed. It must be accepted as the defect of her qualities.

It is not that which interests us in the *Éloge de Guibert*.

Neither can we agree with Sainte-Beuve who finds "boldly original political thought" in it.

The political views in question are obvious enough and, as things turned out, evidently did not contribute much to the solution of revolutionary problems.

She is equally afraid of any "tyrant" who may emerge from the general confusion (*Montmorency*, in which Richelieu appears as an enemy of liberty was inspired by this idea) and of the "agitator" or demagogue.

* See Note. Appendix C.

As a counterblast to either, she is in favour of "a great alliance of literary and business abilities."

It is an idea of her's that we have already met several times before, that an elect body of intellectuals should govern the land.

In this way men of letters would find practical employment.

"If this were so the writer's talent would no longer be isolated, but in direct communication with his actions, his whole life."

This remark was not thrown off by chance.

It is a precise expression of her attitude towards politics and literature at this time.

It was foreshadowed in the *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* : now we see it crystallised to a conviction.

And besides it is not a pose. It is an instinctive gesture.

Without intending it, she puts the theory into practice : and poor Guibert has his turn, just like Rousseau.

The *Éloge* visibly assumes the form of a political manifesto : the author of *Tactique* appears in it as a Republican before that label had come into existence ; and as a concocter of tragic dramas, which breathe a fiery spirit of democracy anticipated.

Again, the whole thing ends in rallying the subject of the work to the banner of Necker.

The origin of the friendship, to which Madame de Staël thus raises a monument, was to be found "in M. de Guibert's deep admiration for my father."

When alluding to the praise of the Chancellor of the *Hôpital* whose outstanding merit, coupled with genuine modesty, Guibert had recognised, she says :

"If only character and talent could be judged so discerningly at the *Hôpital* nowadays !"*

Now, if we wish to examine the reasons for the existence of so many adverse critics of the young ambassadress, the range and scope of whose criticism

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

we have already remarked upon, we need only count the number and observe the quality of the many allusions to "*mediocrity*" contained in the *Éloge de Guibert*.

It is not the least edifying information to be obtained from this too much neglected work. We learn from it that "M. de Guibert combines with rare talents and wit, certain faculties *which are often combined quite uselessly with mediocrity* (a prodigious memory, etc.); we are told that his manners, the high carriage of his head, his uncompromising tone, "*set mediocrity against him*"; "*that the examples of Scipio and Cæsar never have prevented and never will prevent mediocrity from fixing limits for genius*"; "*that the love of favour and power, the smallness and pettiness of mediocrity, are wiped out by the real thirst for glory.*"

This is taking too high a tone for most people to swallow comfortably.

Does it not appear that she divides the world into two classes, one very large and the other very small: the mediocre and those who are not? Is it not pushing the theory of the natural supremacy of mind too far?

If only we could be sure that her criterions were reliable! But the intelligent people who have remained silent or in the background are simply herded in with the stupid people.

We begin to understand that Madame de Boufflers may well have exclaimed at her impertinence, and that certain high ability, and that not the least useful for the demands of the times, refused to be enlisted in the ranks of an *intelligentsia* so thoroughly cocksure and so strangely conceived. Madame de Staël is no sooner at Coppet (she retires there in October, 1790) than she perceives that she cannot endure to stay there.

She finds there "an infernal stagnation," a moral

solitude which the tranquillity of the Swiss landscape irritates to a frenzy.

And yet she did stay.

She saw that her fast failing mother was almost made happy by the catastrophe which allowed her to live out her last days at the side of her adored husband.

Her father, indifferent and downcast, seeing the impossibility of re-entering the arena—an impossibility which his daughter would not recognise—had resigned himself to the task of settling up with posterity.

Madame de Staël remained with her parents for eleven months, eleven interminable months, broken only by one short visit to Paris in January, 1791.

Tormented by two irreconcilable forms of duty, appealed to by two opposing affections, above all, unable to see how she could re-enter the political arena unless under her father's ægis, she demobilised her feverish young energy at the feet of the idol of her childhood and girlhood, up to a moment when such a sacrifice became simply impossible to her and when all persuasion was in vain.

Events were still driving all before them, men, and opinions too, in Paris.

Mirabeau, whom she had begun by detesting but had come to look upon as a saviour, was carried off by death.

On the 21st of June the coach so carefully arranged for by Fersen bore the King and Queen to Varennes as the prisoners of their subjects.

The summer passed.

Everyone was going back to town.

This was a moment when Madame de Staël had never loved the country!

Besides, her baby she knew was making normal progress. Nothing could hold her any longer. Her trunks were packed and she rushed back to Paris.

MADAME DE STAËL

This time she understood that the day for coalition dinners was past.

During the year of 1791 the clash of ideas had become deep stifled hatred between persons. Madame de Staël, who had known plenty of criticism, now had to wipe away the stains of calumny, especially those of the royalist press, which fact was extremely painful to her.

She felt it so much, it aged her so much in spirit from one day to another, that she could hardly believe that she was only twenty-four years old.

The Jacobins she felt to be mere rabble, brutes whom one would pity if they were not such a public danger; besides, they could never have discovered how they could wound her except by reading the *Chronique Scandaleuse*, the *Journal Royaliste*, and other news-sheets of the same tendencies. But the uncompromising aristocrats knew all about her, all, from her first curtsy at Court to her words and actions of that very day; and they concocted things out of their knowledge which let her see all the venom and corruption that the polish of society can conceal.*

To tell the truth, she had given them plenty of excuse, not only by the flaunting indiscretion of her manners, those rebelliously equivocal glances cast at anybody who was somebody (or nobody) in any drawing-room; not by her purposely cynical and risky conversation which was quite in the mode, nor even by flirtations with the Bishop of Autun or the Comte de Ségur, but simply by the determined way in which she would mix up her emotions with her politics.

We can answer for her conduct up to 1788: the *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and the long discussion of Julie's case sufficiently demonstrate that her own case was still pending.

On the 12th July, 1789, Gouverneur Morris speaks

* See Note. Appendix C.

THE STORM

of M. de Narbonne as Madame de Staël's "friend," "*l'ami de Madame de Staël.*"

She must have conformed about this time to the influence of her surroundings, must have put into practice the epicurean morality of a nation in dissolution.

At any rate, it is certain that she had not waited for her father's final downfall, to become the avowed mistress of an aristocrat known as an anti-Neckerist.

This is a curious fact and would be psychologically inexplicable if we did not know that the result of this connection was to make de Narbonne's political outlook considerably more liberal.

Attracted in the first place by the manners and person of this young noble whose richly adventurous past excited her romantic fancy in advance, Madame de Staël was no sooner chosen and installed than she began to lay siege to her lover with all her old notions, and little by little drew him into the camp of progress.

The mantle of Necker had fallen upon de Narbonne. He became the centre of the emotional and intellectual life of this young woman in search of a hero.

She moulded him to her will up to a certain point, but it seemed so entirely instinctive in him to cling to the institution of royalty that she was obliged to yield him that point.

Besides, she was big enough to see that the important questions of the hour were the collaboration of reason and conscience and a good understanding between all fine intelligences and kind hearts. As soon as she arrived in Paris, she set to work to push de Narbonne into the Foreign Office, and had the mortification of discovering that he was not nominated entirely because of her efforts.

However, in December he was given the post of War Minister, always an honourable position, and this made Marie Antoinette remark that Madame de Staël

MADAME DE STAËL

must be delighted at getting command of the Army.*

There was a general impression that Necker's daughter had taken possession of de Narbonne, and had made a politician of the young rake who had hitherto existed on allowances from his mother, which she in her turn squeezed out of Madame Adélaïde by some form of extortion. The aristocratic party did not hate Madame de Staël the less for her capture, and Rivarol's friendship with de Narbonne did not avail to spare her a single insult.

But, politically, de Narbonne was a lost man, and not only because both the right and the left wings detested him, as a constitutional, but because the other constitutionals were jealous of him for being preferred to themselves.†

During the winter 1791-92, Madame de Staël was very much taken up with her idea of government by the *élite* of the *intelligentsia*, and was blissfully happy in having found the means of blending her political and her emotional life in one.

The dream of combining the power of liberty with the charm of breeding was realised in the person of de Narbonne.

It only remained now to share her happiness, to give de Narbonne to the nation, or rather, to get him accepted as one of the arbiters of its destiny.

With this in view, she wrote an article towards the end of 1791, which appeared in Suard's and Lacretelle's journal, the *Indépendants*, an article‡ which tended to prove that the nation desired a constitutional monarchy and an extension of the moderate party.

The proof becomes an affirmation, and the affirmation becomes an appeal.

She repels the accusation of weakness and vacillation which was always levelled at the moderate party,

* See Note. Appendix C.

† See Gouverneur Morris, edition quoted, for Talleyrand's jealousy.

‡ See Note. Appendix C.

and, at the same time, she tacitly admits that the accusation was founded by urging all those who realized in themselves "a coalition of mind and heart" to form a strong resistant homogeneous party of themselves so that the constitutionals should not be labelled: "an absurd mixture, an inconsequent alternative of opposite extremes."

What she understands by the conciliation of parties is the extension of the centre until it includes in its sphere all the marked ability of the right and left wings.

As for the remnant, she hurls at them the most insulting epithet that she knows, that of "mediocrity"; they are aristocrats who will not think "on account of their status as noblemen," or they are Jacobins, seditious and egoistical people who do not understand the real meaning of the words they spue out. Her last word is that "fame and influence must be sought in the very centre of the light of wisdom," and that differences must be healed in the light of open minds, and hearts which are in sympathy with one another.

But events were inexorable. They proceeded ruthlessly on their way.

In default of a peaceful solution, Madame de Staël preferred civil war to foreign intervention.

The Legislative Assembly voted for war with Austria.

On the 20th June, 1792, the population flowed into the corridors of the Tuileries and forced the revolutionary cap on to the King's head.

On the 10th August he was deposed.

The rabble had won.

And that was the end of Madame de Staël's first political experience.

It was absolute defeat, and for the moment there was no appeal.

In this "triumph of assassins" her one idea was

MADAME DE STAËL

to snatch victims from them, her one emotion was pity.

On the very evening of 10th August, while the massacres were going on, she went through the streets to assure herself as to the safety of her friends: she brought de Narbonne, Montmorency and Baumets to the Swedish Embassy, and a few days later, to her great joy, she was able to send de Narbonne to England in company with the German, Doctor Bollmann.

On the night of 2nd September, before her own departure, she saved the sentimental Lally-Tolendal and the Chevalier de Jaucourt from the scaffold, and in trying to rescue the Abbé de Montesquiou, she almost fell into the clutches of the mob herself, the mob which carried out the execution of Madame de Lamballe the very day after.

She escaped, however, thanks to the intervention of Manuel and of the brewer Santerre, and, seeing nothing else for it, she took the road for Switzerland.*

She was again expecting a child.

It was this fact which determined her departure.

But in all this there was still no complete and final disaster for herself.

The world was falling to pieces round her ears, but she still had the love of de Narbonne.

* See Note. Appendix C.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORM : 1792-1794

HER own disaster was added to the public disaster before very long.

This is the dominating fact of the period between her departure from Paris in September, 1792, and the publication of her book, *Passions* in 1796.

Through all that that time de Narbonne was gradually breaking away ; he was deserting her.

Towards the end of November she had given birth to another son ; this was Albert, the prodigal son, predestined to misfortune and premature violent death.

She was only just recovered, when in spite of the formal disapproval of her parents, all her love surging up again, she secretly left for England, pretending that she was going to Geneva.

She arrived in England at the beginning of January, 1793, and installed herself with de Narbonne, at Juniper Hall, near Mickleham, in Surrey.

But as though even de Narbonne's company did not suffice, she gathered round her a circle of constitutional refugees, amongst others de Narbonne's ex-rival Talleyrand, Lally-Tolendal, Montmorency, Malouet (whose presence was some guarantee of his hostess's political integrity), the Chevalier de Jaucourt and the inevitable Madame de Châtres.

All these exiles owed either their lives or their subsistence to Madame de Staël, for she had found means of getting them safely out of France and she supplied deficiencies to those who had lost all their worldly goods.

MADAME DE STAËL

De Narbonne was her debtor in both these regards.

Making allowance for the change of surroundings and the fact that little is known of this episode of Madame de Staël's life, we may say that she went on very much as usual.

She had begun by reassembling her dispersed courtiers and by re-establishing the electrical atmosphere, which was the air she naturally breathed.

She set to work again and began to write a dissertation: "*Sur le bonheur*," on happiness, inspired by the spectacle of the terrible sufferings of France.*

In the evenings she would read out extracts from it, very badly, if we are to believe Talleyrand, who was irritated by the chanting cadences of her diction.

Or else, she would declaim passages from *Tancrède*, with so much pathos, that tears came to the eyes of the impressionable author of *Cecilia*.

On other occasions it was the portly Lally who alternately chanted and intoned, in order to bring home to the audience the full beauty of his *Mort de Strafford*.

She discussed the future with Talleyrand who had just come from London and was, therefore, to be besieged with questions; and with de Narbonne who was miserably depressed and discouraged.

She insisted that they must have a scheme. She approved of Talleyrand who wanted "to fight all those scoundrels, the Jacobins," and was even a little cross with her lover, who seemed to be numbed with despair.

English society had not made them welcome. Nobody called.

The execution of the King had raised English indignation to its highest pitch against the authors of the Revolution, and Royalists were readily believed, in England, when they said that Constitutionals and

* See Madame d'Arblay's *Diary and Letters*, page 488: "It contains the most touching allusions to their country's calamities."

Jacobins were all to be lumped together in the matter of guilt and responsibility.

The reason given for not calling on Madame de Staël was the irregularity of her conduct, but this was only a pretext.

Anyone who was not a thorough-going Royalist was put on the index.

Thus isolated, the little circle at Juniper Hall, which would willingly have shaken off its carking cares by mixing in the life of a country already extolled by Voltaire, found itself obliged to be self-sufficing.

The test was no doubt too severe.

Susceptibilities became more acute, and differences of character became apparent, which had hitherto been veiled in the cloud of passing events.

Narbonne's temper became very unequal, sometimes gay and prodigal of wit, at other times downcast and taciturn. He began to complain finally that his mistress was really too careless of the proprieties.

She on her side chaffed him for his little Royalist prejudices, but uneasiness and reproach forced themselves into her jokes.

When all is said, it is difficult to discover what de Narbonne was really feeling at this time.

He was certainly breaking away from Madame de Staël, but why?

According to Sorel it was just the usual course of an episode in the career of a man who has had many successes with women.*

But it should be noted that Narbonne is no exception among the men chosen by Madame de Staël.

There was something feminine in his character and this is also true of Constant and Rocca.

It was this femininity which brought them together in the first instance.

Narbonne was witty, susceptible to enthusiasm and very susceptible to external impressions.

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

It was thanks to this common basis of their natures that the connection took place, but do not let us deceive ourselves. It was never a case of Narbonne choosing out Madame de Staël and then deserting her: it was she who took possession of him.

Very possibly the conqueror of so many hearts believed, in the first instance, that this was another conquest on *his* part, and it is just because he was finally obliged to realize his mistake and to give up every previous illusion of his masculine vanity, that he began to chafe in the bonds of her many kindnesses and to pine for his liberty.

As for Madame de Staël, it is easy to be certain by studying her actions and her letters, at this time, that she remained passionately in love with de Narbonne.

She lavished on him all the love that she could not give her legal consort, and it nourished itself on the many acts of generosity which sprang from it.

So strong was this passion that she completely lost her head over it.

She forgot to make allowances for human nature, and ignored the simplest psychological observations.

By clinging desperately to her lover she lost him.

To give one instance of her lack of judgment: she wished very much to settle in Switzerland with him, but she went the longest way about to attain her end by acting with precipitation.

If she had behaved rationally, she would have remained in Switzerland until she got the desired permit for her friend to join her there.

That was, indeed, her first intention. She was negotiating to settle him in the Canton of Berne.

But as the negotiations did not succeed in the twinkling of an eye, she threw the whole idea to the winds and rushed off to join Narbonne in England.

This was the way to ruin the whole scheme, and,

indeed, as far as that was concerned, the period of three months spent in England was all time lost.

She found that she would be obliged to begin negotiating all over again with less chance of succeeding in the end.

She went to England, driven by her passion alone.

It seemed to her then *that a gulf would open between herself and her lover if she did not make haste to join him.**

She certainly made herself believe that the object of her journey was to bring Narbonne back with her and she fixed May, 1793, as the probable date of their return, for she hoped that all the formalities in Switzerland would be concluded then.

When May came she was obliged to go back alone, apparently because Necker had made up his mind to cut short this useless prank by stopping supplies.

When the time came to start she was like a woman who is "dragged from all that is dear to her," her tears flowed whenever she tried to speak and choked her utterance.

Arrived in Switzerland she stated her terms categorically: if she was to stay there . . . there was a simple way of keeping her; they must allow Narbonne to join her.

If Narbonne was obliged to stay in England after the autumn, she would go back to Juniper Hall.

"There are feelings which, uniting every aspect of love and friendship, become yourself . . . and more than yourself! When unheard of circumstances, such as the Revolution has produced, have welded together the minds and souls of two people for fully five years, when those same circumstances have given rise to mutual dependence, such that it is impossible for these two people to live apart, when finally everything known as propriety, and worldly consideration and advantage has tumbled into a ridiculous heap of ruins, I do not know what reason he and I would have to go on living if we were obliged to be separated.

* See her letter to Gibbon, Dec. 28, 1792.

MADAME DE STAËL

"Therefore, give up that idea, for I will never hear of it, and tell me what to do . . ."*

Narbonne did not come to Switzerland until the end of the year.

While waiting, she cheated her weary longing by becoming the directress of "the trade in human lives," the lives which she managed to snatch from the guillotine.

This occupation fascinated her, for it proved that intelligence is always good for something after all.

The chance of saving an innocent man's life was something she could not resist, a means of finding a little happiness in the midst of a tragic existence.

In August, 1793, she published a vibrant appeal for mercy for the Queen, who had been ordered before that tribunal which was more like a permanent insurrection than anything else.

In this appeal, Marie Antoinette, who had detested her and had collaborated openly in the ruin of her father, appears absolved from all her sins, a living symbol of feminine beauty and maternal virtue.

Never in her life had this noble woman plotted against France, never had this sovereign harboured sentiments which were hostile to true liberty.

Madame de Staël found herself perplexed. To whom was her appeal to be addressed?

She wanted to reach the nation over the heads of its tyrants and to make the people feel "that no human fate could be so deeply plunged in misfortune"; she wanted to tell the people what she felt herself in knowing that "when you love you cannot inflict suffering." But she feared that thus her appeal would fall short of her desired effect and trying to conceal her repugnance for it, she turned to the tribunal in the attempt to find simple incontrovertible reasons which would penetrate like rays of light into the sullen darkness of the brains of the judges.

* Letter of Madame de Staël to Gibbon.

THE STORM (Cont.)

She assures them that the cleverest people in France are only longing for settled peace and that on condition of its restoration, every Frenchman of every opinion would hasten to their support.

But that the Queen must be saved, because if she were sacrificed no one could parley further with the authors of such a crime.

The tyrants would be annihilated by their own dead victims.*

The executions went on, however.

The small number of lives that she was able to save seemed nothing to Madame de Staël compared with the army of the dead.

She was seized with a perfect horror, once more, for that detestably tranquil Switzerland with its perpetually idyllic associations.

She felt that in Paris she could always take advantage of her position as Ambassadress to increase the number of the rescued.

The success in arms of the revolutionaries, becoming an apotheosis of crime, even brought her to doubt the deep instincts of her nature.

She even dreamed of taking refuge in America, and renouncing all her aims in favour of a life of little joys: "a beautiful climate, music and pleasant society." After all, would it not be better neither to think, feel, nor live any longer.

"To be opposed to the light of human progress is to be lost, but to go with it now is to lend one's name to a history of bloodshed and misery."

Her joy at Narbonne's arrival is dimmed by his news of Gibbon's death.

She is astonished to think that anyone can perish independently of the Revolution.

Nature had begun to form a league with massacre as

* *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine*, published in the month of August, 1793, anonymously, but Madame de Staël was known to be the author.

MADAME DE STAËL

if the contrast between her beauty and man's despair was not already dark enough.

Then, little by little, she came to understand that Narbonne no longer loved her.

She made herself realise it from the beginning of 1794, and the crisis was soon passed and followed by a resigned lassitude which did not prevent her from continuing to lavish a maternal solicitude on her unfaithful lover.

She vented her anger in a novel called *Zulma*, probably after the pen-portrait of herself as *Zulmé* by her dead admirer Guibert, and this work she would read aloud to her friends without any pressing. Frisching, who was not one of her intimates, remarked after one of these readings: "that the little god, Cupid, had surely made sad havoc of Madame de Staël!"

The novel did not leave any doubt as to that, and all her friends knew exactly what to think about it, giving the allegory its real meaning, in this story of a woman deserted, who endeavours to find the strength of resignation by tearing the traitor to pieces in a book which she writes.

Madame de Staël did, indeed, regain her moral equilibrium by portraying a faithless lover sacrificed by the hand of the woman who had loved him too much; and by the fury of her disappointed passion she wound up this episode which, in her estimation, was to have been eternal.

In this work, the gesture of the *Diary* repeats itself and that of the *Passions* is anticipated.

In spite of the romantic or exotic setting, which is deliberately contrived to separate this too eloquent confession from the person of the author, in spite of a misleading passage inserted on purpose into the first preface, which deals with the hostility of the public to a woman whose only fault has been to love her friends, it is impossible to miss the real meaning of the story.

The second preface, which is printed in the *Œuvres*, is much more candid in this respect.

She says, that in order to depict love she must give us *the spectacle of the most acute misery* and a study of a most passionate soul: that to do this she has been obliged to observe the ravages of love “in an untamed soul, wedded to a cultivated mind”; “*the faculty of judging adds a great deal to any form of misery, for it detracts nothing from the powers of sensation in the being.*”

This is *Mirza's* case all over again, with something added, and that something is the calm of despair which has given the sufferer power to analyse her own pain.

“I have chosen a situation in which there is both calmness and anguish at the same time, in which the unfortunate victim is able to observe herself and to describe what she has felt.”

The generalisation, which follows immediately upon this, clearly proves that the said observation was not made in cold blood.

“*When misfortune is irrevocable, the soul regains enough composure to allow of thought, though feeling never, never ceases.*”

The last phrase in the preface contains the unmistakable avowal: “*this work of mine which more than any other proceeds from my soul.*”

Zulma is the story of her connection with de Narbonne, except for the catastrophe of the Revolution.

Here we find her first admiration from a distance, which so speedily turned to love; her quick submission to his seductive charm, which enclosed the sovereignty of genius as if in a lovely casket; we find too the comradeship of those days of danger in common, exile, the fear of death for her beloved; it is all there.

Would you know what passed in her soul when, on the evening of 10th of August, not knowing if de Narbonne was still alive, Madame de Staël ran

MADAME DE STAËL

alone through the blood-stained streets, restraining herself even from hoping, as a propitiation to Destiny ? Here it is :

“ One day news was spread abroad that Fernand had fallen in the fight : wandering through the horrors of carnage, sights never seen by me before, did not leave the slightest imprint on my memory, for I was looking for *him* and the fearful images of death were meaningless to me except as an obstacle which interposed themselves between him and me.

“ After many hours search, worn out with fatigue, I fell down to rest at the foot of a tree ; there, in the grip of a misery so violent that all my vital processes were swallowed up in this one pain, I tried to calm myself by a resolution, formed long ago, that I would never survive Fernand.*

“ ‘ What is there in his death,’ I said, ‘ from which mine would not deliver me ? ’

“ But the one instant that I should have to live through to learn that he was dead was more terrifying to me in itself than the whole of eternity.

“ I could not foresee rest in the grave that the loss of him would commit me to.

“ My mind had never been able to conceive of absolute annihilation and whatever form of existence I might enter into, I knew that I should bear with me the burden of this awful pain.

“ Sunk in motionless despair, examining my soul with ferocious acuteness . . . suddenly . . . I saw him coming to me. Great God ! It was not life, it was Heaven which opened before me then !

“ In one instant I felt every imaginable contradictory sensation of which the human soul is capable.

“ It was he ! My soul gave way under the weight of indescribable bliss.

* About the time of the 10th August Madame de Staël began to carry poison on her person. At least, that is what Fersen alleges, and adds that she moved to the camp of Arras in order to be near de Narbonne,

THE STORM (Cont.)

"He who has lived through a moment like this has devoured a whole long life in that one moment, and for me time no longer exists.

"Yes, oh God! at this very moment plunged into the very abyss of human misery, I thank You for the gift of life to me, because of that one moment."

It is easy to reconstitute the rest of the true story if we brush aside the trappings of romance and re-establish the chronology of events.

"There came a day when calumny made you distrustful of Fernand; you accused him of negotiating with the enemy and of plotting to deliver you into the enemy's hands; you condemned him to death; my resourceful love outwitted you and rescued him.

"I followed Fernand into the desert where your cruel decree forced him to linger for a whole year."

"Though rejected by his country . . . a woman surrounded Fernand with all the tender joys of love. In the desert, he was still a sovereign; he saw happiness and a whole existence hang on one look from him; power and glory were restored to him by my ardour and complete yielding.

"My love was his shield from the injustice of man as it tried to attack him in his thoughts.

"In my heart he read himself . . . he loved me . . . he lived. . . ."

And yet, afterwards, he deserted her.

"Fernand suggested an absence of a few days from me. I opposed this resolution. *I complained of it bitterly. No, I did not demand rights from Fernand on the strength of my benefits to him. It was the memory, the deep impression of my own feeling which forced me to believe in my empire over him.*

"*It seemed to me that I carried such a power and weight of love within me that it must dominate him, that a man loved with such a strength of passion could never dream that he was free.*"

MADAME DE STAËL

The historical setting is to be picked out by means of contrast.

Remembering the homilies directed against herself and the persecution by calumny which had been the price of her *liason* with de Narbone, Madame de Staël makes Zulma plead her case before the tribunal of the assembled nation.

She tells them that "love is above law and man-made opinion"; that it is "*the truth, the flame, the essential stuff, the prime idea of the moral world*"; that, "Heaven itself has not the right to condemn it."

The tribunal upholds Zulma. There is another in the story.

It is a model tribunal; the very opposite of the revolutionary tribunal. It seems to consist of seven old men, chosen at hazard, who, fearing to constitute themselves instruments of Divine vengeance, retire for a week, after pronouncing the death sentence, to deliberate over it, seeking for any possible chance of commuting it.

The deliberation is held in complete silence, in mute contemplation of misfortune and death, and the old men shed tears over this peril for another which they do not share.

Finally, they are won over by the eloquence of the prisoner, Zulma, and join with the multitude which is determined to crown her.

Misfortunes accumulate, public and private, they are hardly distinguishable from one another any longer.

Madame Necker's soul slips away, lulled by gentle music and hovers as a light evanescent cloud above poor Jacques Necker, then disappears.*

The property of the author of *Mémoire pour la défense du roi* was confiscated.

In June Madame de Staël was obliged to break her friend Montmorency's heart by the news of the death

* See Note. Appendix C.

THE STORM (Cont.)

on the scaffold of his brother, the young Abbé de Montmorency. Danger threatened his mother and his wife's mother as well.

She would have been glad to draw her cloak over her own head and to await death in that posture herself. But she could still wage war with the Terror with what money she had left as her weapon, and despair sharpens cunning.

There was a man called Jacques Treboux who offered up all his own heroism in the name of this mission of mercy.

If the guillotine took its toll every day, if the unhappy Princesse de Poix was obstinate in her refusal to be rescued, many fine lives did escape from the massacre owing to the operations of the rescue workers whom Madame de Staël organised and directed. Among these we may count the Princesse de Broglie, Malouet's wife and daughter, the Vicomtesse de Laval, the Abbé de Damas and many others.

And while in Paris as the last victim of bloody fanaticism, even beauty was assassinated, the Lake of Geneva still smiled its ironic smile of flowering June, and did not cease smiling even when Revolution knocked on the town gates.

What was to be done? Thought was no longer worth while! For if one had been certain that it was worth something, then its impartiality would have been an insult to suffering.

Those who lived then were in the presence of "a phenomenon in monstrosity," which is no longer human and paralyses the mind with its monotonous horror.

It is a descent into Hell, circle by circle, deeper and deeper still, into a darkness which grows more opaque and yet more opaque.

Then something curious happened.

Madame de Staël composed a lyrical poem, born from the intensity of her pain.

MADAME DE STAËL

She was to do the same thing in 1805, but that was partly done in order to pass the spirit of Italy through her own personality.

This time she was experiencing a check to all her faculties. It was the immobility, accepted as the only refuge from grief, which was to bring her soul to commune with itself. She sings of her suffering, instinctively, to bring it consolation, to put it to sleep, to sublimate it and make beauty of it.

Sainte-Beuve saw clearly what she was trying to do. For poetry is the language of all supreme suffering which it sublimates to its own sovereign forms of beauty, creating beauty from evil, flowers from mud.

If by any chance Madame de Staël had been a born singer, this is the moment which would have revealed the fact. But she was not.

L'Épître au Malheur is a poor thing, just a melodramatic description of two lovers at the foot of the scaffold, whose tragic insignificance is exaggerated by Madame de Staël's inability to give her story its true proportions.

And yet the soul of Madame de Staël is in it, for this poetical dissertation on unhappiness in the abstract, which becomes a political apostrophe and resolves itself into a most complete intimate revelation, has hardly less psychological and documentary value than the story of *Zulma*.

She gives us once again, in the exordium, the feeling which flows incessantly from her pen at this time which is inspired by the contrast of imperturbable nature with the miserable passion-wracked existence of man.

“Often to cool my weary, fevered eyes
I gaze where the majestic water lies,
The Lake with her great Mountains, and I gaze
On those great shapes, reflected down, that brood,
In endless calm, on shining plenitude.

THE STORM (Cont.)

Often I cry : ‘ Is man in all his days,
Never to come to knowledge of this peace ?
Is he, alone, ungranted this release
From the deep throbbing of a stormy heart,
And in the natural order, held apart ? ’ ”

We may hold what opinion we choose of the poetical talent displayed here, but it is impossible not to notice how closely Madame de Staël has approached true romantic inspiration.

The equation of Lamartine is certainly embodied in this passage, and it has not been dragged in to set the correct current in motion, but exists as the result of something deeply felt.

Madame de Staël no longer ignores the harmonies—or the dissonances—of nature.

For the moment she is the more occupied with the dissonances, but she is beginning to be conscious of both, not by the eyes alone, but by the vibrating sensation of all her woman’s nerves.

This is an advance.

There is something even more disconcerting to follow.

We will pass over some passages somewhat laboriously composed, and find ourselves confronted by lines with a real promise of lyrical development.

“ O Grief ! O Grief ! France founds your empire now !
We struggled bitterly . . . but we must bow
Beneath your yoke. How should we find escape,
Where even Reason takes a torment’s shape ? ”

She should have continued in this vein. But when she goes on to trace the lasting effects of grief, we perceive immediately that the spurt of pure flame has died down.

We get a succession of commonplaces, of which the pace increases in proportion to the writer’s ability to win back the customary stride of her prose, through all the difficulties and hindrances of versification.

MADAME DE STAËL

“ Barbarians . . . nor death, nor history
Can give your vileness all its vile deserts ! ”

Our expectation has been disappointed.

But since the elegy has died away let her now give
rein to her indignation !

The rhetoric suddenly collapses and is modulated
for the relation of the body of the poem.

“ No guilt was his, of even those new crimes
Left undefined by the tyrannic times. . . .

With her he loved, he lived in secrecy. . . . ”

Finally, however, she returns to her own confession.

From the general she inclines, more and more, to the
particular.

After deploring the errors of the refugees who made
exile bitterer than it need have been by refusing to
drop old grudges (her excommunication by the
extremists on her father's side was not the least of her
woes at this unhappy period), Madame de Staël, by a
natural transition of thought, passes to the little
colony of the faithful who were united round her at
Méziery.*

“ Other good hearts there were to vengeance sworn,
Whose each affection had its partner grief.
Helpless to save the old or latest-born,
Their love for these was torment past relief.”

* We see by what follows that *L'Épître au Malheur* was almost certainly written in June, 1794, and from the indications of Kohler, who is always very precise about Madame de Staël's visits to the Château of Méziery, near Lausanne. The work alludes to Madame Necker's death, which proves that it cannot have been written before the end of May. Then the allusions to “happy Helvetia,” “your tranquil peace, my country!” would not be appropriate after the revolution of July. Do not let us be answered that we must not rely too much on vague indications in the text. That is Madame de Staël's literary method from first to last: evolution towards generalisation, which must be traced back to its source. But there is nothing against the theory that she began the poem at Nyons and finished it at Méziery. (See Kohler, page 173).

THE STORM (Cont.)

She is thinking particularly of Montmorency mourning under a cruel blow and still ignorant of the fate reserved for his mother.

And in writing the third part she is deeply occupied with that feeling of impotence before the misery of others which takes the very life out of her sympathetic soul. That is not all :

“ For Envy’s furies may
Lead still the chase, even at misfortune’s height !
See all the world lie in a ruined heap,
And calumny will perch there at the top
To mock at tears ! Have you not known the power
Of that rank poison ? Oh ! you, who do defend
Fair freedom’s faith, and are declared the foes
Of all extremity. Oh ! exiles from your home,
One little blemish in your purest thoughts
Implacably returns as chastisement.
To prejudice, all thought is culpable !
And he who reasons well must needs be he
That soonest doth betray ! ”

Her conscience is not at rest.

Some of the responsibility for this bloody record has been laid at her door.

Ever since 1792 she had been, in Malouet’s perfectly sincere phrase, “ remorseful.”

In 1800 she is still concerned with it.

“ One day, only one day, when one perhaps lent support to thoughts, words, or resolutions which led to cruelty and suffering is enough to torment a lifetime, to destroy in the depths of one’s heart both the feelings of calm and of universal beneficence which lead one to expect a friendly welcome in the hearts of all men.”

In the *Épître* we now come to a dozen verses, full of personal revelations, relating to the absence of Narbonne, who was not to return until August, and

MADAME DE STAËL

whose ungrateful attitude added secret pain to all her other sorrows; unattractive projects for voluntary exile in America, the fabulous country of liberty, which seemed so very far away; death which had snatched wife from husband, breaking up the "holiest of all marriages," the marriage which had inspired her girlhood's enthusiasm for matrimony as an institution, that which seemed to her indissoluble, because of her father's and mother's indestructible affection for one another.

"Life is parting us from love;
Like the spent and homing dove,
The soul is drawn across the sea
To virgin soil where souls are free.
Only Nature does not change,
Daily, nightly, in her range.
But death and evil passing by
Are pitiless to tear or sigh.
Holiest marriage is the last
To wither in their nipping blast.
Love is faithless, friendship light,
I, bowed in the common plight,
And nourishing a secret pain,
Must weep again, must weep again."

The feminine note in this does not appear by chance. It is to be found in the *Recueil* of 1795 and is repeated in the *Œuvres*.

Madame de Staël makes a point of letting us see that she is writing from her own experience, above all insisting on the moral solitude which was an exasperation to her griefs and set her apart from her companions in misfortune.

And yet in her lowest depths of grief Madame de Staël derives a certain satisfaction, and one might say, a legitimate moral compensation in observing her own suffering with attentive eyes.

THE STORM (Cont.)

The attitude of grief, of the woman who has drawn her drapery over her head and waits in silence, strikes her imagination and subtly flatters her sensibility.

This is why we must neglect no effort to fill in gaps in the biographical picture, in order to establish the truth of this period of her life.

It appears that, for a time at least, Madame de Staël was forced to abandon all continued work by the disarray of mind and nerve into which manifold and appalling shocks had driven her.

But she never resigned herself to lying fallow.

On the contrary, the more circumstances withheld her from taking an active part in the affairs of France, the more her urgent need for action expressed itself in her immediate surroundings, the more was her curiosity arrested by men and things that were near her.

Thus we find her in the spring of 1794, before the death of her mother and the composition of *L'Épître au Malheur*, prepared to enter into coquettish relations with Lavater, sending the great physiognomist a copy of her *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine*.

Soon afterwards, when at Zürich, she arranged a meeting with Lavater, who found himself embarrassed by a tête-à-tête which rapidly became a monologue.

When she had departed he emitted a philosophic wish:—

“That witty and sensitive intellects were also endowed with strength and calmness.”*

Lavater may have believed that Madame de Staël had come to Zürich on purpose to see him.

In reality, as we know from others, she had been obliged to cajole the authorities of Zürich and to make use of all her small fascinations on the inhabitants of the town, to get permission to settle there with Talleyrand, who had been driven out of England in company with other exiles and friends.

This pre-occupation, the anxiety she always felt for

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

the safety of her friends, her untiring activity in saving victims of the Terror, her daughterly attentions to her father, her responsibilities to her children which she certainly did not entirely neglect, the low condition of her whole being, which was quite as much due to imprisoned energy as to the fearful shocks she had lived through (all the while forcing her idealism to survive them) . . . none of all this prevented her from sending out new shoots of living green in all directions.

She did not go to Zürich on purpose to see Lavater, but once there she could not dream of going away without seeing him.

Her emotional or intellectual curiosity, which ever it might be, was never for a moment denied its satisfaction.

Even her friends were amazed by the variety of her interests and the extraordinary unconsciousness of the driving-force which impelled her forward at this time, when her faculties were not in full play.

Those unpleasant persons who said that her practical sympathy was less a virtue than a satisfaction to her need of activity, were not altogether wrong.

It is that same need which explains her adventure with the Swede, Ribbing, if adventure there were.

Everyone cried out upon the indiscretion of it !

Madame de Saussure and Mathieu de Montmorency formed a league for the protection of Madame de Staël against herself, a mission which Mathieu imposed upon himself all through her life without effecting anything thereby.

“ Why in the world should she not meet Ribbing ? ” she asks.

She really could not understand the horror of her friends or the consternation of her husband, who was just beginning to build up the structure of a new future with touches of infinite caution.

THE STORM (Cont.)

“ Really,” she thought, “ the prudence of average human beings is unbearable.”*

What is the harm of having Royalist friends, even if you are in favour of a Republic, she was forced to ask herself, under the rule of the *Directoire* which had turned her out of France.

She wanted to be in touch with the whole world quite irrespective of party, with all intelligent people and opinion.

It was thus that she began to give her attention to the first addresses of young Benjamin Constant.†

Narbonne had fallen a victim to a determined siege from his former mistress, Madame de Laval.

Gently and insensibly he regained the sphere from which the Revolution and Madame de Staël had, for an instant, snatched him away.

Once the Terror was past, he settled down in Paris with Madame de Laval in a little house in the rue Roquépine, where no one would set foot twice who wished to hear Madame de Staël well spoken of.

A place in Madame de Staël’s affections was, therefore, vacant once more.

By a chance in which she could not fail to see a special dispensation of Providence, the man and the opportunity came together.

One day she learnt that at last Robespierre had met the fate he deserved, the fate he had forced on so many others.

Was the Terror vanquished then ?

Would France re-open ?

Would humanity resume its interrupted march of evolution to inevitable destinies ?

If the answer was yes . . . why then she could live the year 1789, all over again, with Benjamin Constant instead of Louis de Narbonne.

* See a letter to Nils von Rosenstein quoted by Souriau in his *Idées Morales de Madame de Staël*.

† See Note. Appendix C.



BOOK II

THE BALANCE-SHEET OF DISASTER
A FRESH START

1795—1800

CHAPTER IX

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE. EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE, 1794-1795

WHEN the Terror came to an end, Madame de Staël felt the necessity of recovering possession of her real self, then, of moving once more in the world, a world which was so much changed that it was quite as much unknown to her as the world in which she had made her *début* in 1786. Like everyone else, she was stunned and incredulous for a moment.

The news of the fall of Robespierre must have reached her at Lausanne on the 30th or 31st of July, 1794.

She felt, of course, profound relief, but the "inexpressible joy" described in her *Considerations* does not burst out in a letter she addressed a few days later to her friend, Princess Henin.

The unexpected event came upon her whilst deep in intrigue.

She was just on the point of at last effecting the release of the rebellious Madame de Poix and Madame de Simiane; and suddenly no more news from Paris came through to her. Her agents must have altered their tactics.

A few prisoners had indeed been released, and it was easy to predict that, as Robespierre's successors could not shed more blood, they would shed less.

But there was a long step between that and any conclusion that all was once more for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

She never dreamt of that, but was full of hope that her agents in Paris had not been taken in by fallacious optimism.

MADAME DE STAËL

"I cannot think," she wrote, "that our friends can have changed their opinions owing to this faint ray of hope; such ludicrous confidence would make me rage with despair."

She is still of this mind by the end of the year. Constant's presence did not contribute to her peace of mind, though the admiration that he lavished on her comforted her wounded vanity.*

She was fascinated to the last degree by his type of intelligence, but his physique, a short-sighted blonde, inspired her with a physical repugnance which she had difficulty in overcoming, all the more because the woman in her was weary and worn out.

She was in no hurry to yield him all that de Narbonne had possessed.

However, in the spring of 1795 her resistance gave way.

Constant played a whole drama of despair, with great vigour, using threats of suicide; and in the end was able to note a discreet mention of his triumph in his *Journal Intime*.†

On the eve of her departure to Paris, while Necker, afraid that he would lose his daughter as well as his wife, begs her "to curb her ambition," she sent her *Épître au Malheur* to the printers, together with the three novels, *L'Histoire de Pauline*, *Mirza* and *Adélaïde et Théodore*, besides an essay on fiction which she had just produced.

She adds two explanatory notes, one which serves as a foreword to her poem, the other in order to make it known that her *Essai sur les Fictions* was written later than her novels.

The tone of these notes is most significant. She is still hesitating between hope and fear. In the

* At the opening of their liason Constant said that: "Madame de Staël is a being apart from others, one of those superior beings who are not to be met with more than once in a century." Letter of Constant to Madame de Charrière, 21st Oct., 1791.

† See Note. Appendix C.

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

first she asks whether "one may safely regard one's griefs as memories?"

In the second she admits that misfortune has taken out of her by exhaustion almost as much as it has put into her by development of her faculties.

"The overwhelming nature of events which surround us impresses us so deeply with the nullity of thought in general, the impotence of personal feeling, that, *having lost our way in life*, we can no longer even find the right road for hope to take, nor discover what is to be the driving-force to excite effort, nor what principles will henceforth guide public opinion through the errors of party spirit, or what will constitute the new dazzling inspiration to urge men on to glory in any career."

This passage is taken from her *Recueil de Morceaux Détachés*, and it expresses exactly what was going on in her own mind.

She had lost her bearings in life.

She was nearing the age of thirty, and it seemed a great deal to her.

She felt that she was already ageing.

Not time, but grief, terrible and unexpected grief, had worked its will on her, leaving her impregnated.

She was afraid that it had left her so changed that she could not recognise herself.

She was afraid that the exuberant optimism of her young days was gone for ever, and that she had entirely missed the happiness which life can either give or withhold.

Her whole mind was bent upon the consideration of this vital point.

Thinking over her past life, she decided that she had never had complete happiness, but that she had been much nearer it in her youth than she was at this time.

Now it seemed to her that she had begun the descent of that fatal slope which leads quietly and

MADAME DE STAËL

monotonously to the grave, that is to say, that she was facing imperceptible decay.

No! That she did not and never would accept! With all the might of her being and all the energy of her ripened womanhood, avid for life, she brushed away the vision with which she had dallied complacently in her childhood.

She would remake the foundations of her life, she would remake her life itself and never ask of life more than it would give her, if only she might keep life, might *live*, and so drive from her, by action, the haunting vision of final inertia.

This problem had occupied her seriously during the last years of the Revolution and had then inspired the idea of her book on the *Passions*, from which the *Essai sur les Fictions* first took shape.

The marks of this crisis of her being appear in everything Madame de Staël wrote during this post-Revolution period.

Her two masterpieces—the *Passions*, 1796, and *De la Littérature*—are the two great milestones on the road to which this crisis led her, and they cannot be considered apart from each other. Already, in 1793, before her secret grief had added its burden to those shared with the community, Madame de Staël had felt that the problems raised by the Revolution were intimately connected with her personal happiness.

She considered herself in some sort responsible for the conduct of public affairs.

She was the daughter of a Minister; she felt that she owed it to herself and to the nation to shed some light on the causes of the disaster. At the same time, she sorely needed some means of employing her time and energy until, the Terror having been laid low, she could resume her natural position as political Egeria in Paris.

On her arrival in England there is not the slightest

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

doubt that she soon came across Godwin's book, *Enquiries concerning Political Justice and its influence on general virtue and happiness*, which had not long been published. This was the very angle at which she had been regarding the problem herself.

What had perished in the French cataclysm was, in the very first place, the happiness of millions of individuals, whether famous or obscure; a whole nation had suffered as she had suffered.

The political problem was in reality a moral problem.

The obvious cause of the explosion was that which undermines and destroys individual happiness: passion.

And then again, in order to judge precisely of the problem, it must be given its right position in history, freed from false perspective which would bring it too near; it must be held at a distance, considered objectively.

Thus Madame de Staël found means to combine two problems under the same aspect, the problem of happiness and that of the destiny of France. She made one problem of it in her own mind, one unique problem, for it was unique to her. Satisfied with her conception, she hastened to work it out, telling herself that evil was still in activity and must speedily be suppressed.

So it was that in the spring of 1793 Madame de Staël set herself to a great work, both of synthesis and analysis, which she called *De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations : Study of the Influence of Passion upon individual and national happiness*. She set to work almost gaily.

She admits immediately that historical synthesis would pre-suppose actual knowledge that she did not possess.

She would have had to work at it very seriously and she meant to.

MADAME DE STAËL

But as she was always thirsting for results, she breaks into the analytical side of her scheme to begin with, and writes essays on the passions of man, which she submits to her guests at Juniper Hall for criticism.

It would be hazardous to state definitely that there are no remnants of these first sketches in *Les Passions* as we know it to-day. But there cannot be very many.

And the reason for that is that she did not progress far with the work at that time, and soon broke off altogether for a period of several months. The causes for this sudden discouragement are not difficult to discover. There are two: first, the Terror. She had never even dreamed that the existence of such ferocity was possible in human beings. She was almost disabled by it, and became incapable of sustained mental effort owing to the paralysis of mind which the vision of such suffering entailed.

She writes in the introduction to the *Passions* :

"It would not have been to my credit if I had been capable of pursuing this work during the Reign of Terror."

And again, in the preface to her *Réflexions sur la Paix* : "During the bloody reign of Robespierre, when each new day brought a fresh appalling list of victims, I could do nothing but long to die myself. . . . I should have reproached myself for mental effort which was independent of this all-absorbing pain."

But if Narbonne had not deserted her at this critical moment, she would soon have regained her equilibrium.

It was the personal sorrow, added to all the rest, which beat her down.

As she revived little by little, the important point was not so much the saving of the nation as the rescue of herself.

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

First, she must build up the ruins of her own life, and sew up the rents in her poor lovely garment of happiness, torn to ribbons by the passing years.

And so the work wandered away from the theoretical to the personal.

The second part, political and historical, is dismissed to an indefinite place in the future, and it is with that in her mind that Madame de Staël quietly affirms that she had been incapable of sustained thought during the Terror.

She worked at the first part during the opening months of 1794.

In her treatment of the chapter on love, the very dryness of the analysis betrays the existence of her own mortification; insensibly she glides into a personal narration, veiled autobiography, and relates the exact circumstances of the betrayal in *Zulma*. We discover this from the first preface to that story, which also exists to explain why the first part of the *Passions* was not published at the same time as *Zulma*.

“In my solitude of the last two years I felt the necessity of fixing my mind on some abstract idea which could drag it from contemplation of the horrors of reality.

“Torn and wounded by the spectacle of every species of misery, my mind turned naturally to the contemplation of happiness, as on a stormy tide, which is carrying you further and further from the shore, your thoughts cling desperately to the memories of dry land.

“*The Influence of Passion on individual and national happiness* is the subject with which I propose to deal.

“This short episode is taken from a chapter on Love which the work includes; *the work, as a whole, is planned in a more philosophical vein, but I hardly know whether I can or will carry out my project as*

MADAME DE STAËL

originally designed, or whether I should dare to publish it even if it were ever completed.

“Those days are past when I expected a kind reception, whatever I did or wherever I went, and I have been robbed of the confidence I then possessed, which sprang from my own certainty that I had never wronged a single human being, nor missed a chance of being useful to friends, acquaintances, unknown persons, and even enemies.”

This means that she had planned to write a philosophical treatise, but had been gradually drawn into writing about herself, and that more frankly than ever before.

When she read over what she had written, she was really alarmed.

She had given herself away completely to a public which might be hostile!

Jeers and insults would rain upon her bruised soul!

It would be more prudent to sound public opinion by publishing *Zulma* first, and decide afterwards whether she could risk the ampler confession of the *Passions*.

This was what she did.

Zulma appeared and did not make any stir except in the circle immediately surrounding the author; other people had other things to think about. The experiment was, therefore, a failure, but Madame de Staël lost no time in turning to other things herself.

She had written this confession mainly in the interests of her own moral hygiene. Whether published or not, she felt enormously the better for having written it.

She had been forced to find some means of making life endurable, and writing took her mind off the immediate pre-occupation of her wounded soul. But she had also read a great deal; far more than she had ever done before.

Without any plan, and jumbled together, she

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

turned over the leaves of Virgil, Homer, Spenser, Milton, Butler, Swift and Montesquieu. It was a daily discipline which she had ordered for herself, and at first she found it very irksome.

She was seized with fits of impatience and depression, she, who could never sit still for a quarter of an hour.

But at last, by the exercise of will power, she began to feel the benefit of this discipline.

Though ravaged by passion, her soul began to find a little peace.

Thus she arrived at the conclusion that literature is salutary in its effects, that it can even deaden the passions and tends to disengage the soul from the tyranny of a fixed idea.

She knows that this is the case.

While still hesitating over the great question of whether or not to publish the confession, this strikes her as a new truth (so clearly has it been demonstrated to her) which it is her duty to communicate to others.

In this way she was brought to compose and publish a little offshoot of the great work on the *Passions*, which treats this crisis in her life objectively.

The convalescent tells us all about her recovery before publishing the account of her malady. She gives her little work the serious title of *Essai sur les Fictions*.

THE ESSAY ON FICTION

This essay is a jewel of feminine thought and a precious morsel of autobiographical revelation.

It contains something very like a theory of romance which proves that Madame de Staël's curiosity took that direction rather than any other, but which also proves that her reflections on literature are not yet very deep or very disinterested.

Torn from the network of feelings which inspired

MADAME DE STAËL

it, the literary theory appears lifeless and a little ridiculous.

Madame de Staël had her own reasons for discussing the novel rather than drama or poetry. She had wished to escape from life in books. Having made the attempt, she knows quite well how this is most easily done.

"Human life," she says, "seems so well calculated for happiness, that simply by a happy arrangement of memories, images and created figures, we may gather together the happiness which is scattered over the face of the earth . . . and thus overcome . . . all the miseries of destiny."

Of all creative works of imagination she considers a good novel the most efficacious in this respect.

She lays it down as a principle that good novels are those which pass insensibly from life into fiction or fiction into life.

"If the reader can feel . . . that but for a change of names . . . the story is that of herself . . . or himself . . ." then the novel is a good one.

The novel must be a prolongation of life, and one must be able to glide from one into the other, absolutely without let or hindrance. According to her, the reader is the criterion. The reader desires as few obstacles as possible.

It seems to Madame de Staël that there are two classes of fiction which, far from making the desired transition easy, make it difficult; and they are historical novels, and those which deal in marvels which put a strain on the imagination.

She disposes of the first class in three pages. Historical novels, she says, are simply importunities, if not impertinences, which come between history and your own mind (books such as *Anecdotes de la Cour de Philippe Auguste*).

For the most part, these novels consist of a series of licentious episodes, the chronicle of scandal born

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

posthumously, undertaken with the object of reducing heroes to the common measure of humanity, works which soil the noble canvases of history quite uselessly.

Noble characters are taken from history, "and though not necessarily disfigured, they are stripped of all that made them mortal in order that their apotheosis may be contrived."

Then there are the drawbacks of the marvellous school of fiction: Madame de Staël will have nothing to do with them either, and she is surprised at any reader who is capable of swallowing any such puerilities in the quest for life.

To do so, men must become children, and philosophers must step down into the throng to play the hide and seek of allegory.

Referring to Spenser's *Faery Qucene*, she says: "It shews weakness of intellect if a reader requires concrete images in order to understand abstract ideas."

And then, further on: "An idea or a feeling is seldom or never present in its full force when it can be expressed by an image."

According to Madame de Staël, the foundation of the literary art is moral analysis.

"In addressing man she wants to draw out all the great effects of the character of man."

"One may explain all astonishing phenomena by a series of moral causes."

In support of this she quotes cases: "What we admire in Milton's Satan is the man . . ."; "What remains of Achilles is his character . . ."; "What we want to forget about Renand's passion for Armida is the magic mingled with her fascinations which have given birth to it. . . ."

What she finds tiresome, on the contrary, is the intervention of some god in the course of the narrative which, by breaking the fine web of psychological

MADAME DE STAËL

interest, breaks up the attentive reader's curiosity also.

"Mythological intervention is far too arbitrary. There is at one and the same time too much certainty and too much uncertainty about it. . . . We may be certain that a god will intervene, but we never know when the intervention may take place. Why spoil the reader's pleasure in this way? The passions of men will give us phenomena, metamorphoses, and miracles enough; they form an inexhaustible mythology which opens wide heavens and digs the pits of hell for those who know how to interpret them. . . ."

She means that Dante's *Inferno* was nothing to the Gehenna of the Revolution.

Obviously, though life torments her, she has no wish to leave it.

She impatiently rejects all the literature of antiquity, because none of the anguish of the Revolution is reflected in it.

No doubt, these mythological fabrications are very ingenious, she thinks, and are suitable to the stage, or would be if anything like them existed in life, if one did not know that "no passion, no destiny, was ever joyous yet."

Life is horrible, but we are interested in nothing else, according to Madame de Staël. We cannot break away from it.

If the storms of life sometimes force us to take shelter in the citadel of the past, we do not wish to find its walls so thick that it is impossible to hear the dull, muffled shock of the waves that break against them, nor the howling of the tempest which never dies away.

This, then, is literature as it ought to be; it should take the form of fiction, but fiction which we have already defined negatively.

It must not deal with the past, as the present is, she thinks, obviously more interesting.

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

It must not lead the reader astray by gratuitous obscurity (example *Hudibras*) or by esoteric formality such as mythology.

According to Madame de Staël, of all literary forms, the novel is that which best represents life.

Stage conventions prevent drama, either comedy or tragedy, from being absolutely realistic. Life is not condensed, does not express itself in violent contrasts, is not theatrical in fact.

In a play it is impossible to depict a passion with the full development of passions in real life, be it ambition, love, or hatred.

The theatre only deals with climaxes.

In a novel we may weave the actual tissue of life.

True enough! The theory is well stated, and after that we are not surprised that Madame de Staël claims the very highest consideration for the novel thus conceived.

“Such a novel, of which some examples exist, is the very finest production of the human mind.”

It is a document which holds the same position to individual life as that of history to national life, and it, therefore, has equal dignity with history.

Now let us see what follows.

It is, by the way, extremely important to avoid any misunderstanding here, for the significance and authority of words, in space, is strictly in proportion to the severity with which they are controlled.

She is going to deal with a type of fiction which she calls “natural.”

As soon as the definition of it begins to take shape from the limbo of the commonplace, we perceive that she is cramping and confusing herself, in a manner which rouses anxiety.

In the first place, this fiction (a picture, or slice of life, whichever you prefer) is to depict “all the inner movements of the soul, in which events are more or less arbitrary symbols.”

MADAME DE STAËL

This is a serious restriction, but it is not the only one. If souls are to be dealt with, it must be with the object of curing and fortifying souls.

Thus it is not simply by conveying a picture of life that fiction is moral ; the picture must be adapted and corrected to bring the moral home.

Now for an example :

We all know that moral treatises fail in their effect because nobody reads them.

Memoirs are in the same case, which is yet slightly different.

They are too much like life itself ; not eloquent or dramatic enough.

"We must add to the truth a sort of dramatic effect which does not make it unreal, but which makes it tell out of the picture because of this subtle stress which has been laid upon it."

"It is the painter's art exactly. He does not alter things. *He heightens their power of attacking sensibility.*"

She adds : "The multiplicity of detail in even some famous novels is quite unbearable.

"The author admires his own realism, but does not understand that anything which detracts from the interest *destroys the only truth of fiction, the impression that it makes.*"

From this we learn that even novels have "dramatic conventions," which must not be infringed.

We may admit this. But another criterion has been added to the first.

A good novel is one which produces a moral effect in the reader without exciting his impatience.

Not only must he be able to lose himself in it, but he must be able to derive instruction from it.

Who must ? Who is this reader ? What is his identity ?

Are there not as many readers as there are in-

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

dividuals, and as many different tastes and needs as there are persons ?

This is not so, in Madame de Staël's opinion.

In normal times, she thinks, individuals do differ as to their tastes and needs, but under the stress of common misfortune, all decent people are alike.

What was needed in 1795 was a novel capable of taming the bestial ferocity of the Jacobins. She writes :

“ We may one day find that we owe to powerful fiction the certainty that never again will the nation number among its people, beings whose moral character forms one of the most incomprehensible moral problems that ever existed. The gradation of the known to the unknown is broken off long before we can arrive at the power to conceive the motives which have guided the actions of the assassin-executioners of France.

It is evident that no human influence, no fleeting impression of pity, no flexibility of mind has ever been developed in minds like these by any circumstance whatsoever, or by any written work, since they remain capable of such unvarying cruelty so utterly divorced from all impulses of nature ; cruelty which has given mankind its first conception of mental activity which disdains all limits, a complete conception of crime.”

Therefore, she thinks, a new form of fiction is urgently needed to tame these savages. It never strikes her for an instant that there is a grave disproportion between the remedy and the disease.

She seriously proposes to prevent future revolutions by supplying the right kind of fiction to the potential authors of revolutions.

And why not ? Nothing will shake the foundations of personality so effectively as a strong current of sympathy.

If that is once set up, anything else becomes

MADAME DE STAËL

possible. Good novels should lead insensibly to "refined heroism"; to a transcendent moral idealism which leaves mere sense of duty lagging far behind.

There would be nothing toilsome in this climbing the heights. It would be a pleasure; it would be accomplished on the wings of emotion . . . and the activity of emotion "*may be described as the physical pleasure of the soul.*"

Then, again, in the interests of the unfortunate patient, it would be necessary to give the new type of novel a breadth and amplitude which has never existed in fiction before.

And here Madame de Staël brings herself to make a tremendously generous concession.

Up to that point she had only prescribed for the nation the same medicine as that which had benefited herself.

But she recognises that she must alter the dose for the nation, and give it not only love, but all the passions, "ambition, pride, avarice and vanity," which may be exploited by authors "who pique themselves in knowing the inmost secrets of the human heart."

But Madame de Staël cautiously refrains from an exact indication of the contents of this novel of all the passions. She rather confounds it, as is quite natural after making such a sacrifice, with the type of novel in which there is little or no love, the philosophical romance, such as *Tom Jones*, which she hardly distinguishes from Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, although the type is entirely different.

We can easily understand how this "*grande amoureuse*" reconciled herself, in 1794, to the novel which does not deal with love.

She had not emerged from what was, in a sense, a nervous collapse; she feared the passions let loose by the Revolution, and, still more, she feared the passion which had made such ravages in herself.

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

It is a question of getting through life at all bearably, rather than a question of making oneself as sensitive as possible to life.

Life will make itself felt all right !

There is nothing to fear in that direction.

To Madame de Staël at this time it seemed that everything which detaches one from life and engenders neutrality and peace of mind, is good.

Fielding's detached and ironic attitude of mind, which always suggests him to us as cool and smiling, seemed to her an example to be recommended to all passionate characters.

She recommends this attitude all the more insistently because she knows she is herself incapable of adopting it.

It must be clearly understood that this was only a theory of the moment, which vanished and left no trace, in anything that Madame de Staël wrote after this period.

Delphine and *Corinne* are decidedly not novels which ignore love, still less are they novels of all the passions.

In 1800 she laid down a formula, "that from the power of loving, one may draw an endless power of making pictures and situations without ever exhausting curiosity in the source of them." She was then only repeating an inner conviction which emerges in her treatment of *Adélaïde et Théodore*.

But she did not wait until 1800 to state that the novel which ignores love is not the novel which commands the most voluntary and sincere homage.

In vain, from time to time, she tries to put a limit upon herself, and to stifle her deep instincts ; they always blaze out again.

After having duly extolled the philosophic romance, that of all the passions, she goes on to say that, after all, the noblest passions derive from the passion of love, the master-passion ; and that, therefore, in

MADAME DE STAËL

dealing with love the author embraces a large part, and certainly the best part, of life.

To Madame de Staël it is indisputable that :
“*enthusiasm in friendship, devotion in misfortune, honour for parents, passionate affection for children, do not and cannot exist in hearts which have neither felt nor pardoned passionate love.*”

“Respect for duty may be felt, never any charm or fascination in its accomplishment by anyone who has not loved with all the power of his or her being, by anyone who has never once lost himself or herself in another.”

L'Essai sur les Fictions thus ends on a contradictory note, in which, by one hasty movement, the woman of feeling upsets the elaborate structure which the woman of action has laboriously built up. The woman of feeling has found consolation in reading romances.

The altruist in her, felt it her duty to communicate this fact to the world at large, or to those who had most need of it.

But Madame de Staël found her scheme unrealizable. For herself the best escape from life was a passionate love-story. But a love-story would be no use for reforming revolutionaries. She strikes it out and elaborates a scheme for a novel which she could never read herself.

Then, in order to get out of the difficulty, she throws off the responsibilities which she had so rashly shouldered and ranges herself, not with the majority, whose passions need calming, but with a little company of elect and passionate souls who would continue to study *Werther* and the *Lettres Portugaises*, and, above all, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, “a work which stands unique in the whole world.”

These breviaries of passion stand between the passionate elect and their inevitable solitude.

“Let ardent and passionate souls enjoy these

AFTER THE CATASTROPHE

works, for they cannot make themselves understood in the world as it is.

"The feelings which rack them are almost incomprehensible to, and unceasingly condemned by the majority.

"They would believe themselves alone in the world, and might end by detesting the natures which set them apart were it not that these few passionate and bitterly sad works of genius are as a voice in the desert, affording some of the sunshine of happiness which the passionate may not find in the world as it is."

She fears love. But her only consolation is in dreaming of love. She does not push the paradox to the length of recommending the revolutionaries to cure themselves by passion. The paradox is still there though. If these mistaken souls had formed part of the elect, if they had had more passion, instead of less, there would never have been a Revolution.*

* See Note. Appendix C.

CHAPTER X

TENTATIVE ACTION. POLITICAL WRITINGS,
1794-1795

MADAME DE STAËL's inclination to believe in the peace naturally increased with the duration of it.

There was not only her own life, but the life of the nation to be reconstructed.

From her point of view, it would be a crime for decent people to abstain from intervention, through pessimism or pusillanimity, or to neglect any opportunity for vigorous support of the peace. Before publishing her *Recueil* she had brought out a pamphlet entitled "*Réflexions sur la Paix adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français.*"

"A truce has been accorded us," she writes in her preface to this; "there are no more massacres, and the campaign is about to close."

This was a moment to seize, an opportunity for the whole of France.

"O France, O land stained with crime and bloodshed! All thinking Europe has long hesitated on the brink of pronouncing you accursed. Should this cessation of hostilities only serve the cause of injustice, the shame will fall on France." She wanted to act. But she was still sceptical.

Her unfailing faith in "the irresistible advance of the light of reason" did not prevent her from keeping account of the facts, and was not strong enough to overcome the mistrust with which the formidable "phenomenon" had inoculated her.

She had so often hoped for immediate rehabilitation before, and had so often been disappointed, that her optimism had finally learnt how to defend itself.

There is nothing of note in the *Réflexions* but this attitude of mind, and, as to any other political suggestion, the work may be described as a sort of "amplification of Mallet du Plan."*

The attitude is entirely peculiar to Madame de Staël. She demands peace. "The whole tired land groans for peace!"

She had already made the same demand when she wrote her *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine* in 1795, and she demands it again, giving reasons why she should receive satisfaction. She reminds the English that "France by herself is stronger than the whole of Europe combined; that as long as France was opposed by foreigners, she would fight and conquer, and her government would go forward under the impulsion of the very blows which were aimed from outside to check its march."

"... that if peace be not concluded this year, it is impossible to foretell to whom France will refuse it next winter," and she adds, as a post-script, the practical advice that Pitt should be replaced by Fox.

However, on turning to France, she found herself up against the same problem which had faced her when she was writing on the case of the Queen.

France must be addressed through the Committee of Public Safety, who had the army in command and was all-powerful, for good or ill.

She does not conceal her horror of the crimes of the Terror, but she makes it clear that the Liberal party is disposed to collaborate in the foundation of a Republican constitution.

Referring to the danger of chastisement which the demagogues might fear to draw on themselves by any premature abandonment of power, Madame de Staël hastens to say that "The crime was too great to be avenged, and that the sufferers are too completely exhausted to be capable of feeling revengeful."

* This is Sorel's opinion, op. cit. page 54.

MADAME DE STAËL

Let the army be licenced, and extremists either of the Royalist or Popular party excluded from all deliberations on the founding of the new state, and let practical means of realizing it be arrived at by means of an appeal to reason. The important thing for the moment she considered to be the securing of real peace. She wanted the negative advantages of the truce preserved and consolidated, the negative advantages of "being able to live without the horror of seeing everything dear to you offered up as a sacrifice, to live without being robbed of fortune, liberty and life."

Above all, the fanaticism of formulas was to be avoided.

A system which was not anarchical was the paramount need of the moment, a system based on reason and circumstance, whether it be a republic like America, or a constitutional monarchy like England.

This work does not shew any sign that Madame de Staël wants to out-step reality.

Her whole case is the yearning for peace, expressed after her usual fashion as logical argument. Her manner of setting out the case does not make any pretensions to originality, or to the lighting of beacons in the historical landscape of political thought.

She does urge action. And her last word is the most important one.

If she is to act she must be allowed to re-enter France, for she is not prepared to create a French Republic while residing in Switzerland.

She paints a lurid picture of the dangers to the new republic which might be constituted by a horde of needy and despairing members of it, congregated in exile beyond its borders.

The exiles were not all of the same description, but she wanted them all recalled, including "the small number of those really guilty towards their country, the whole crowd which it is absurd for the

country to exclude in its own interests ; the women who were naturally terrified into flight ; and, finally, those who started as firm friends of liberty, who only deserted the country when it became the empire of crime, thereby escaping almost certain death under a government which you cannot but recognise yourselves as a tyranny."

Having made this announcement, and M. de Staël, not yet divorced, having been re-established as Swedish Ambassador in Paris, thanks to a certain skill in intrigue, she decided to take the bull by the horns, and to install herself once more in their great house in the rue du Bac.

She left Lausanne on the 15th May, and arrived in Paris on the 25th.

She was accompanied by Constant.*

Once in Paris she was alive again, and began to think positively and constructively.

Her *Réflexions sur la Paix* adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français had, however, arrived in Paris at about the same time as herself, and, far from producing the effect she desired on the Convention, it let her in for strict supervision by the police.

The Convention had only absorbed the essence of her pamphlet, that is to say, the recommendations as to the repatriation of the exiles.

It was known through Barthélemy, French Ambassador in Switzerland, that this was not a question of purely academic interest to Madame de Staël, that she was thinking of personal friends in the first place, such as Matthieu de Montmorency, Narbonne, Jaucourt, whom, much against her will, she had left at the frontier.

The Convention was, however, desirous of remaining on good terms with M. de Staël, who was not only

* See P. Gautier, *Le Premier Exile de Madame de Staël* (*Revue des deux Mondes*, Vol. 33, page 899). In the following pages we have assembled much of the information given in M. Gautier's admirable article to which the greater part of our knowledge of the facts of this period is due. But we have made our own interpretation of the facts.

MADAME DE STAËL

an Ambassador, but a democrat to his finger-tips, and in high favour with the Committee of Public Safety.

It, therefore, seemed enough to warn his wife, through the Press, that all her actions were under observation.

Madame de Staël's republicanism, although of recent growth, was quite genuine.

But this time it was less a question of principles than of persons.

She would have liked to accord a general amnesty to all the demagogues and all the members of the Convention, without exception, but on condition that they made no further appearance in public affairs.

It was not exactly, as M. Paul Gautier has it, that she wanted a Republic formed of monarchists.

She wanted a government of educated persons, of gentlemen, which is a different matter to government by monarchists.

She piqued herself on running her salon as a centre of conciliation, and, as she was still fascinated by the charm of aristocratic breeding, many of the nobles who had already slipped back into France rubbed shoulders there with rough-and-ready Jacobins, who tried to catch the aristocratic tone, and travelled further away from it than ever, by reason of the ill-humour they betrayed over their failure to do so. But, added to the fact that the real Royalists still looked upon her with extreme disfavour, she was now no longer an inexperienced girl on the threshold of life, and had learnt to see the real man through his envelope.

A Royalist who still clung to the principles of the Fourteenth century was worth no more in her eyes than a Lebon or a Carrier.

Her attitude, which was perfectly logical and comprehensible, though personal, again drew on her the

detestation of the two extreme parties, and Louvet's party, the so-called Republican party, not understanding what she was driving at, simply regarded her with mistrust.

Seeing that the Convention continued to hold the leading strings, Madame de Staël employed all her arts to win its favour. She bombarded the members of it with invitations to dinner, attended its sittings most assiduously, and made love in particular to the *Commission des Onze*, who were appointed to frame the new constitution. But as all her tactics had only one aim, that of "getting rid of the men who had ruled during the Terror," and as Madame de Staël was not completely made up of discretion, and as she never ceased to destroy any *prestige* which she won, by immediately employing it to repatriate exiles who could only embarrass the government, she got nothing out of all her trouble but the irritation it provoked.

The first climax was arrived at towards the end of June.

Benjamin Constant had made a first political appearance with considerable flourish by attacking the Convention (which, instead of being wiped out, was perpetuating itself by imposing a percentage of its members on the new government), and then withdrawing his attack.

It was suggested to M. de Staël that his wife would greatly benefit by a visit to the country. But having serious business on hand, she refused. She was exerting herself to get permission for Talleyrand to re-enter France through the intervention of Marie-Joseph Chenier.

The deputy Legendre got wind of this intrigue, and denounced Madame de Staël as a "Siren," and a "go-between of *émigrés*."

M. de Staël, who was present at the sitting, quietly left the chamber without protest.

His wife, after having assured herself that Talleyrand

would be allowed to return, herself retired to Matthieu de Montmorency's estate at Saint-Gratien to compose a considered declaration of her political principles.

From the Constitutional that she had been in 1792, she had become a protagonist of Republican ideas.

She had made this transition quite easily, gliding noiselessly from one thing to the other without any jerks or bumps, and without the slightest twinge in her political conscience.

In a second pamphlet, called *Réflexions sur la Paix intérieure*, she takes pains to demonstrate that all "Royalist friends of liberty quite conscientiously convert themselves into "Republican friends of law and order."

"Are the Constitutionals to be accused of betraying their opinions and their party in supporting the Republic ?

"No, they are only following their principles to a logical conclusion . . . the founders of the constitution of 1791 ought to be the defenders of the constitution in 1795."

The end is the same, only the means to reach it have been changed.

Only "limited intelligences " pique themselves on never changing their opinions. Those who move easily, and by right, in the domain of thought, cannot fail to be aware that thought has mobility, and insists on adapting itself to circumstances. She told the moderate Royalists that they ought to perceive "that France can gain immediate peace in a Republic, while armed force is the only road to Constitutional Monarchy," or, to put it differently, "the only road to Constitutional Monarchy would be another return to the stupid arbiter of force."

And what would be the result ? The Convention would relapse into Jacobinism. Were not the unhappy Vendéens and the Royalists, who were being massacred at Quiberon, tending in that direction.

Surely, surely, all reasonable people must agree that civil war would be a grotesque disaster, a piece of insensate folly in a position where the partizans of a limited monarchy, and those of a proprietary republic, ought to meet at all those points which unite men and their feelings, principles and interests.

Madame de Staël displays a great deal of practical sense in her argument.

What she says amounts to a recommendation to Royalists to let themselves go with the stream for a time, and to reach their end on a slanting course.

If a king is really necessary, time will bring forth a king, in the form of an addition to the magistracy, not in the form of a conqueror.

Her argument when she attacks principles is weaker, and this is natural, because her own principles were so very flexible, and she found it difficult to understand that anyone could attach much importance to matters of pure formality.

She has no idea of betraying the Republican party when she dazzles the eyes of moderate Royalists with a vision of their own ideas of evolution.

She does not feel that she is exacting a great sacrifice from the Royalists either, when she invites them to cast off their Royalist opinions for the moment and step down to mingle with Republicans.

The feminine suppleness of her intelligence is exasperated by the rigidity of men's minds.

In her eyes the "royalism" of the Royalists is a mere trifle, which could be hidden away—at any rate, for a time—in the interests of France as a whole.

Her suppleness of mind is decidedly not that of a cynical opportunist, however.*

If she cannot be labelled either Royalist or Republican, it is not that she despises the puny proportion of human thought and accepts its inevitable relativity,

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

but rather that she passes to the logical conclusion *and estimates that a political constitution does not exist for its own benefit.*

To Madame de Staël the political constitution, whatever form it takes, exists to secure a tranquil, free and intelligent life for all members of the nation.

She insists that France, whether Royalist or Republican, shall be governed by the most intelligent Frenchmen !

Thus we see that she has never budged !

It is exactly the same thought as that of 1789, presented in the form which the circumstances now ordain.

In the *Réflexions sur la Paix intérieure*, the idea is more categorical than ever.

It is a refrain which appears in different modulations on every page :

“ *The ignorant shout for liberty ; only the enlightened can give it them.* ”

In a nation where all illusions subsisting on difference of rank have been done away with, is not the power of analysis and reason the only authority that can be established ?

Should not breeding and intellect combine to form *a natural aristocracy* which would be very favourable, both to the prosperity of the nation and the well-being of the intellectuals ?

“ But see ! What a need there is of re-populating the country with men distinguished alike by their talents and their virtues. What a desert is our country for those who thirst for glory ! etc. . . . etc. . . . ”

Then comes her last word :

“ But the first stride towards liberty can only be made by those of the nation who are the most distinguished for their virtues, their talents and even for the consistency of their opinions.”

However, the Monarchists in Paris had made use of

the elections to strangle the infant Hercules of the Republic in his cradle.

Barras employed young Bonaparte to purge the sections. It was on the 15th *Vendémiaire* (5th October), 1795, that the Committee of Public Safety, recovering a little authority in the action, finally ordered Madame de Staël to leave Paris before ten days were up, as she had persisted in giving shelter to Royalists who only scorned her sage advice to join the Republicans.

She had returned at the height of the elections to canvass any Royalists who would listen to her.

She never unpacked her electoral manifesto, *Réflexions sur la Paix intérieure*, preferring at the last moment to substitute the electrical power of her spoken word.

The *Réflexions* were not printed until 1820.

On 21st December, she set out for Coppet.

CHAPTER XI

WINDING UP THE CRISIS. FIRST PHASE. THE INFLUENCE OF PASSION ON INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL HAPPINESS, 1795-1796

No doubt Madame de Staël was annoyed at being driven out of Paris in this way ; but she took it in very good part.

In the first place she had taken her Benjamin with her, and she had begun to love him most enthusiastically. His devotion and admiration supported her from day to day.

And then her departure was not altogether against her will : she really wanted time to reflect upon herself and upon events.

Events did not worry her much. The truce was still holding good and that was the essential point.

The members of the Convention who were to be passed into the new government in vain opposed the *émigrés*, they were all dismissed just the same, after a very short delay.

It was only a question of waiting until the ground was cleared.

Then one could begin to build.

In the meanwhile, in order to set herself free for this future of useful action, she considered it her best course to press her research into passion to its conclusion and thus to shed light upon her own inner being.

The fact was that the research was already made, and the conclusions drawn.

She knew, in the depths of her own mind, that she had made too exacting a claim on life and that the only step necessary for the enjoyment of a little real happiness was to exact a little less.

But this was still hazy within her.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

And she did not really want to admit it either. This reluctance shows us more clearly than any other illustration could do, the clash of her mind with her instincts.

As was habitual with her, to get this subject clearly visualised, she must work it out on paper.

Added to that, the public must be shown what to think of her, how to estimate her. She had been rash. Paris had electrified and rejuvenated her, had given back all the sparkle of her wit and not a little of the sparkle of her impertinence of 1786.

Instead of working for victory underground, she had rushed out into the open, completely forgetting her programme of concealing herself behind Constant, who still enjoyed the privileges of being unknown in the political world.

She had gone too far with her letters to deputies, her visibly interested coaxing, well spiced with mischief, if not with contempt.

With an eye to the future it behoved her to use prudence at once in order to correct the bad impression she had left behind her, and to substitute a better one, more just and more complete.

The political world was afraid of her ability ; it was alarmed by the way she went to work ; she was represented to the public as an abnormal and dangerous phenomenon.

Well, she would let them all see how far they were mistaken !

She would prove that she was indeed a woman, in spite of her commanding mind, and would prove that she was the first person to suffer through that mind.

She would expose her own weakness before passion, the laceration of her own heart by betrayal, the stupor it had thrown her into and her final renunciation.

The public, always so eager, so willing, to believe calumny, might go so far as to believe the truth.

The Directoire might allow itself to be persuaded that it had attached too much importance to appearances and that, after all, this acutely sensitive woman was more dangerous to herself than to the government.

It would only be the truth.

She only had to bring what she had already written up-to-date, to develop it and to keep the central conclusion of her multifarious reflections intact.

She worked without intermission and towards the end of June, 1796, she had finished the book.

She worked so rapidly because she felt that she was being held in quarantine at Coppet, so to speak, and she wanted to get away.

She added a preface to the work.

"Condemned to celebrity among those who do not know me personally, I feel it due to myself that I should be judged by my writings.

"I have been ceaselessly slandered, and though I am unwilling to draw attention to myself, I have been obliged to yield to the hope that by publishing the fruits of my meditations, I shall be able to give some true idea of my habits of life and the nature of my character."

She did not think it necessary to inform the public that this book of confession belonged to the year 1794, rather than 1796, and that she had already, and from that time forward, given to the problem a solution in fact, which differed from the solution she arrives at in the book.

But, indiscreet as usual, she involuntarily lets the public perceive, or, at any rate, lets the attentive reader perceive, that she is once more struggling in the dangerous but delicious snares of love.

And quite involuntarily also, she lets her irrepressible optimism override the general attitude of disillusion in the work.

At the same time she does not want to seem to be thinking only of herself.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

It was not thus that the problem first presented itself to her mind.

The re-birth of Madame de Staël is inseparable in her mind from the re-birth of France.

The two problems go hand-in-hand.

But the book on France is not written, is not even sketched out, and she cannot wait for that to publish the other.

But it is impossible also to sever her thought in two, and to hand over to a malign public a volume which is obviously all about herself and, therefore, denies the existence of the altruistic thought which also has very real existence.

The public must be informed at once of the whole scope of the work she has planned out.

One day, in the dim future, she will examine the problem of national happiness in the light of history.

But, before attacking this formidable problem, she decided to formulate the conclusions which that task would inevitably reveal, in an Introduction to the present work.

And for that matter, as this work proceeds, we find the unity of the thought asserting itself.

The personal problem is a moral problem, and the moral problem is the basis of the political problem.

Politics and the confession go hand-in-hand, as feeling and action always do with the author.

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE WORK.

If we efficiently consult the history of the world we are bound to discover that, at all times, the happiness of nations has been compromised either by the absence of, or the excess of liberty ; by despotism on the one hand and by anarchy on the other.

Political well-being is to be found between these two extremes.

Now let us apply this impartial conclusion to the French Revolution.

Despotism stands for the Royalists and anarchy for the Jacobins.

Royalists and Anarchists are, therefore, equally dangerous extremists.

To second either party would be to prolong the Revolution.

The Republicans stand mid-way between the two.

They are the true friends of liberty.

Having weighed in the balance the respective merits of the hereditary system and of Republicanism, they have concluded that "everything is in favour of France remaining a Republic."

This last lesson, drawn from the world's history, is not only singularly lucid and singularly applicable to post-Revolution France, but may also be seen to differ hardly at all from the conclusion arrived at by Madame de Staël, by the light of her own reason, in 1795, when contemporary circumstances inspired her with the idea.

There is something to add, however.

The Introduction goes on to state that liberty is not everything. It must be an indispensable condition for happiness, but only because it leaves the individual free to make the most of his faculties.

Liberty in little countries like Switzerland is of little use to anybody. Talent languishes there.

"In the small, obscure states, art makes no progress; literature is not brought to perfection either by the emulation, which excites eloquence, or by that possibility of making multitudinous comparisons which alone can form taste."

This acts as a depressant on people of genius who are compelled to reside in such places for "it would be easy to prove that it is in men's very nature to tear themselves out of obscurity if they can; that they gather together in order to multiply mental shocks;

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

that they make conquests in order to extend their power, *in a word, that wishing to excite the action of their faculties to the utmost, to roll back the boundaries of the human mind to its limits, they invoke by common accord all the circumstances which tend to bring about these results.*"*

Now for happiness. Peace alone will not ensure it. Liberty is only a preliminary.

Madame de Staël had enjoyed both peace and liberty and had been, none the less, mortally unhappy.

Her father considered it strange that, after having imperiously demanded peace, his daughter had returned hot-foot to Paris where no peace was to be found.

The history of the world not only proves that the French Revolution must conclude rationally, not only that France must assure "the independence of Republics," but that this independence must be accompanied by "the splendours of Art, Science and Literature."

The government to be appointed, whatever it calls itself, must be an organisation which promotes the service of humanity by genius.

"We must provide a government *which will create opportunity of emulation for genius* and put restraint upon all mere party faction; it must be a government *which can offer a great man an aim that is worthy of him*, and it must discourage the ambition of usurpers of meaner attainments. . . ."

This is the positive programme, precise as thought, but vague as a programme, though it does not vary.

It applies to the future and, indeed, Madame de Staël intends that all her unwritten second part shall contrast with the first part by being less theoretic, more positive, more optimistic.

The remainder of the political thought of the *Passions* is retrospective, a commentary on the

* See Note. Appendix C.

immediate past which reads like the moral history of the French Revolution reviewed by Necker's daughter.

It is also a commentary on the whole matter seen from within : the French Revolution is dealt with as a terrible manifestation of human passions.

The political phenomenon is traced back to its moral source, to the oddly constituted beings who exploited it and carried it to the point of depravity.

Two things are necessary to the formation of a despot. In the first place, with regard to himself, he must be ambitious, that is to say, a cold calculator, instinctively circumspect, spontaneously and without the least effort egoistic, possessing just enough intelligence to be a cynic and to act as such.

After that, in order that this despot may impose himself on humanity, anarchy must have enchained real thought and made it impotent ; the fanaticism of party-spirit engendering envy, vengeance, crime (a brood of inter-related vices, a nest of vipers), must have substituted brute-force for the prestige of rational thought.

Anyone will admit that envy, vengeance and crime do not make for happiness. Madame de Staël is not original there. But according to her all these passions find their source in ambition and party-spirit.

The hierarchy is a novel one and we are curious to see how Madame de Staël establishes the claim.

The two chapters on ambition and party-spirit are long ones ; they act as the buttresses of the commentary.

Ambition pre-supposes calculation : it is a " harsh and sombre passion," embodying " a kind of contempt for the human species," an egoism " which parches and desiccates the soul." The worst adventure which can befall this passion of scheming mediocrity is to encounter genius in its path.

A struggle must then be enacted in which ambition is condemned beforehand to bite the dust.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

“The mind of an ambitious person is always on the stretch to discover any symptom of superior talent about him. He experiences both the pain and the humiliation of this pre-occupation and in order to arrive at the destination of his hopes, he must constantly reflect upon the limited nature of his own powers.”

The really impossible alliance, the most antithetic combination which one could possibly imagine, would be that which attempted to bind these two contradictory inspirations together.

It goes without saying, according to Madame de Staël, that a man given up to ambition has not genius.

Madame de Staël does not even dream of such a paradoxical hypothesis.

But she considers that a man of genius, though he would never live for ambition, might temporarily lower himself to the methods of ambition, might condescend to intrigue, calculate and to deceive humanity in the interests of his quest for the happiness of mankind.

And that would be followed by two sets of consequences.

In the first place, the man of genius would make himself horribly unhappy in the process, and would “feel real anguish” over his temporary use of dissimulation for “*no one can defy his own nature with impunity*”; and secondly, if he did not succeed, if his calculation and deception brought forth no fruit, they would have accomplished nothing, but the proving to the eyes of the world that genius can lie and deceive like the common herd and “*can we imagine a heavier misfortune than to have been given a reputation utterly at variance with our real selves?*”

Here we have a conception of genius and ambition which proceeds from really original thought and is related to a particular period, that of the Revolution, and to a person whose opinions are too peculiar to

herself to be automatically in agreement with those of the world in general.

“In time of revolution nothing but ambition can succeed. And what an ambition! To be swept on among the foremost in the current of the whole affair . . . to rush like the Gadarene swine down a steep place . . . once started, there is no stopping . . . you may see the abyss ahead, but what of that! . . . to try and avoid it would be more perilous than to defy it. . . . Some people think that they use influence in a Revolution, that they act and effect something . . . but each man is simply one pebble more, sent rolling down the slope by the wheels of the car of Revolution. . . .”

People of intelligence have hung back from the first. Ambitious men swarm on to the Car, enjoy the unaccustomed eminence for a moment, are jerked off and crushed under the remorseless wheels which go grinding on.

We know who those ambitious men are . . . they are Marat, Danton and Robespierre.

This is the French Revolution seen in one light.

The other aspect treated by Madame de Staël is that of party-spirit, the origin of all evils, beginning in envy and vengeance, and travelling through every stage to that final depravity which is sheer love of crime.

It is a passion which “could easily replace dram-drinking,” an intoxication which is worse, because more dangerous than the physical one.

It has absolutely no relation to the mind.

It is a fanaticism which levels everything, a fever which obliterates individuality by confounding the most diverse temperaments into one medley.

After absorbing this poison, man is incapable of mental sight, hearing, or understanding.

He is horribly stiffened into a paralysis of mind of which he cannot rid himself even if he would.

The principle which he would force down every

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

man's throat is the whole dogma of his party, neither more nor less, and that, in season and out of season, but especially out of season, when the pressure can effect nothing but injury to the cause.

There is not the slightest doubt that this phenomenon is closely related to the physical order.

"Violent bodily exercise, a furious onslaught utterly uncontrolled, imparts a sensation of keenness and vigour to the whole person which acts as a potent intoxicant.

The same thing happens after an onslaught of thought, delivered from all bonds, intent only on furious advance to the most extreme opinions.

"Yes," repeats Madame de Staël in the chapter on Crime, "it is a physical sensation transported into the region of moral phenomena."

We have only to remember the gestures and whole attitude of Robespierre in the tribune, especially the convulsive movements of his hands!

All the orators of Demos unchained, roved restlessly up and down, from one end of the tribune to the other, exactly like wild beasts in their cages.

Party-spirit then is nothing but fanaticism.

Ambition is calculated egoism.

Welded together they took the shape of the Terror.

That is for Madame de Staël the ultimate explanation of the perversion, and the abortion, known as the French Revolution, which was the work of fanatics, maddened by the promptings of small ambitious men.

This is the history of 1792-1794 in a nut-shell.

From the historical point of view it is an immense simplification.

The leaders of the Revolution are unanimously relegated to the category of ambitious men.

The mob which they drove along, hardly knew what it did want, but whatever that was, the mob wanted it fanatically, that is to say owing to the paralysis of

MADAME DE STAËL

mind, fanaticism, which is a devastating passion occupying a unique position apart from all others.

The net result of all this was that intelligent and active people were condemned to a long period of enforced idleness.

That is Madame de Staël's real grievance.

Let us examine the essence of this party-spirit which she withers with her contempt.

It is really the attitude of mind diametrically opposed to her own.

It is intolerance instead of intellectual curiosity.

It is the eternal obstacle which is always obtruding itself between herself and the realisation of her really fine theory of government by the *élite* of brains and personality.

And what is ambition as Madame de Staël sees it?

It is the sort of ambition which she has not got and is incapable of having.

Take two persons, the ambitious man, and the fanatic, as she sees them in the *Passions*, and let us suppose that the Swedish Ambassadors grants them an interview. What would be the result? A stand-still! Absolute defeat!

The fanatic would ignore the bait and would not bite. He would not enter into a discussion or, if he did, it would take the form of a monologue, after the manner of Condorcet, which would not suit Madame de Staël at all. He is an impassioned being, but not reasonably impassioned; his passion is not the passion of thought which burns a clear flame in the head, and gives light, but not heat.

He is a perfectly irrational being. His reason is immovable, because of the paralysis of his rigid mind, which she tries in vain to shake.

Her encounter with the ambitious man would be still more unsatisfactory.

He would smile and parry the attack, giving her the

irritating enigma of his discretion in return for the enthusiastic candour of her onslaught.

How many and many a time had Madame de Staël been through that experience! How often she had met these two irreducible personalities in real life!

She had met the man of circumspect ambition at Versailles first, when she made her *début* after her marriage.

The fanatic had ruined her coalition dinners, the '95 series, as well as the '89 series.

She could get on very well with any other type of man, and it did not matter to her whether they were virtuous or vicious men, for she was not concerned with that, but was always questing for what interested her in human beings.

She was complaisant towards the ordinary egoism of man which is quite compatible with all the air of being a jolly good fellow, considered desirable in their intimates by Madame de Staël and the majority of us.

But the dangerous, dried-up, calculating egoist!

No! And his victim the fanatical automaton!

Never!

Both those types were the antithesis of herself. She distrusted them profoundly, instinctively. And though she might try to reassure herself by predicting that the hour was at hand when rationality would prevail, she was afraid of those two forces which fascinated her by their mysterious potency, a potency which was not at her command.

She roamed round and round the two enemies untiringly, seeking for a joint in their armour, which always repelled her and yet always attracted her to fresh efforts.

In these forces she loses her key to humanity. She is not herself; and yet the forces are always there to prove that humanity does succumb to their malign power.

MADAME DE STAËL

Her criterion fails her. How to explain it? She is baffled.

If these enemies, combined, were to set out on the march once more, she really does not know what would become of her in a world that she thought she knew through and through.

For the Terror had taught her that the assault of the human brute could paralyse her, not with fear, but with incapacity to understand; could tear the very elements of her *prestige* from her grasp, and reduce her (for whom action was life itself) to incoherent hysteria.

THE PERSONAL PROBLEM

This is the personal problem :

“ You start in life, let us say, determined to consecrate it to winning the love of your friends and the approval of the public.

“ You feel that you have never done enough for those you love; never given them sufficient proof that you could not do without them; that the daily tasks of daily life cannot satisfy the glowing soul that is in you, your need of devoting yourself, of giving yourself up to the service of others.

“ You sketch out a future which includes all those with whom you have formed ties; you are all the more certain that these ties will last for ever, because you know yourself incapable of ingratitude; you know that gratitude has rights, and you believe more fervently in friendship that is based on the ties of gratitude than in any other on earth.

“ Everything else is a means. That is an end.

“ You also desire public approval, but it seems to you that the existence of your friends is guarantee enough for that.

“ Have you not exerted yourself right and left

for them ? And they know it. They will tell other people how nice you are.

“ Surely, truth and genuine feeling *must* win in the end ! It cannot but be recognised ! The innumerable proofs which flow from truth must finally blot out calumny !

“ *Your speech, your voice, your tone, the very air you breathe, all seem to you to bear the imprint of your real self ;* and you do not believe that you could be misjudged for long. With this complete confidence in everything and everybody, you hoist all sail for the voyage on the sea of life.

“ All that you know, all that you have been told of the unpleasant natures and dispositions of a great part of humanity is classed as history in your mind, just like all the moral experience of others which you have been told about, but have not experienced.

“ It would never enter your head to apply one of these general ideas to your particular experience. Everything which happens to you and surrounds you must surely be an exception : *your mind will have no influence on your conduct ; anyone who has a heart listens to the inner voices, the voices of the heart and obeys them alone. That which you have never felt may be registered by the mind, but can never direct your actions.*

“ But at twenty-five years of age ” (Madame de Staël excuses herself the avowal of a few more), “ at the very moment when the full stature of the being has been attained, a cruel change comes into your life ; it is no longer considered that your whole future is before you, in many ways your die is cast, and men begin to consider *whether it will profit them or not to throw in their lot with you.*

“ If they see less advantage than they had hoped for, if their expectation is ever so little disappointed, when they decide to desert you, they bestir themselves to give colour to the wrong they are about to do

you ; they search out a thousand faults in you to account for and absolve the greatest of all in themselves ; those friends who make themselves guilty of ingratitude, attack you to justify themselves. They deny your devotion and accuse you of being too exacting. They assemble all sorts of contradictory theories in the effort to wrap your conduct and their own in a haze of uncertainty, which each man can explain in the way that best suits himself. What misery this brings to the heart which only longed to exist for others and finds itself betrayed ! The loss of the dearest affection of all does not prevent you from feeling the smallest slight of your least valued friend. ‘ That one, as well ! ’ you think painfully, and the last tie that is broken gains a value that it never had in earlier days.

“ Then the public which had shewn you favour also begins to lose its indulgence ; it likes success which it has foreseen ; it becomes the adversary of success of which it is not the cause ; it goes back on what it said before ; it destroys what it formerly encouraged, and this injustice of public opinion may cause you suffering a thousand times in a day.

“ Any particular individual who turns and rends you is not worth regretting, and yet you suffer acutely from the accumulation of all the details of this painful process which unrolls slowly before your eyes, and, though already certain that you will have to see it out to the painful end, you suffer through every painful stage of the journey.

“ Finally, your heart withers under this cruelty, and beautiful life becomes discoloured and drab.

*“ You fall into errors yourself out of disgust with life, which horrify you as much with yourself as with others, and discourage you in your system of making for perfection in everything, the system that you were so proud of. You lose your bearings and can no longer find your way.”**

* See Note. Appendix C.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

This is the history of Madame de Staël's own life. This history seems to her curious enough, the problem it embodies important enough to merit long reflection.

She generalises in order to reflect more efficiently.

She has got to find a working solution of the painful problem in which the two equations are herself and life.

She must take care that there are no slips made, and she must view the matter objectively and with clear sight.

While subjecting herself to scrutiny, she holds herself at arm's length, and endeavours to be anonymous, a stranger and a phenomenon to herself. When the work is concluded, she confesses that she herself was the object of her observation.

"I wrote it with the object of rediscovering myself beyond all these multitudinous misfortunes, with the object of freeing my faculties from slavery to my emotions, of raising myself into an abstraction which would allow of my analysing the painful condition of my soul . . . and to generalize from the experience already collected in my mind."

This is what she wanted to do, but she could not succeed.

The problem is a personal one, otherwise it has no existence.

In order to generalise, the abnormal elements would have to be withdrawn, and it is precisely because it concerns an abnormal person that the problem exists at all.

Try as she may, Madame de Staël cannot succeed in generalizing.

Restriction after restriction excludes average humanity from the arena.

Happy people have nothing to do there. They represent mediocrity. They have no passions.

Passionate souls must conceive of happiness as

“ the union of all contraries ” ; or, rather, the union of all the blessings without their corresponding detracting : “ hope without fear, activity without uneasiness, fame without calumny, love without inconstancy, imagination which will embellish those we possess, in our eyes, and wipe out the memory of those we have lost . . . ”

And the passionate elect, having this conception of happiness in antithesis, also find that they are on the brink of a peculiar crisis in human existence :

“ . . . at this fatal period when the solid earth seems to slip away beneath our feet, when we feel more uncertain of the future than when we trod the cloud-land of childhood, we suspect everything which we formerly leaned upon, and seem condemned to begin life all over again with the buoyant hope of childhood withdrawn, at a time when we should still be rejoicing, with scarcely one third of the road of life traversed.”

It is at this age that everyone should read the book of the *Passions*.

“ No one should read it earlier, for I did not begin it or even conceive it before I reached my present age.”

We see how it is.

She has need of us, of the great public, in order to carry out her examination of herself ; she needs spectators for the struggle in which she is about to engage.

The more deeply you enter into the book, the more resolutely you must endeavour to resist the flow of its undercurrent, which has a quite terrible insistence.

You will lay down the book after reading the three chapters on Love, The Thirst for Fame, and Vanity, deafened by the vibration of this human machine, by this monotonous plaint, which seethes with many varied notes.

The despairing cadence of the autobiographical introduction is to be heard in each of these three

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

chapters . . . happiness thirsted for; happiness lost; happiness regretted.

A definition of happiness takes shape.

It is "the unattainable," "every sort of impossibility."

Love and Glory are equally baleful.

Suppose we premise the actual attainment of Fame after long toil and heavy sacrifice. There is no travelling the road to Fame without shedding all the illusions of youth by the way.

And then suppose you have attained Fame. Its possession is a perpetual agitation to thought, and brings fever into action.

" . . . a single moment of calm is to be feared "; "the cessation of action would be your greatest misfortune."

"The unstable equilibrium of your position threatens you every instant with a downfall."

While friends stand on one side and do nothing, your enemies eagerly watch for the smallest opportunity of injuring you.

Public favour rarely lasts a man's life-time. More often it is for the passing moment. Once an idol falls, the mob turns on it with jibes.

"*The thirst for fame excites the emotions and the mental faculties beyond their natural range, but the return to the normal condition, far from being a cause of enjoyment, is a sensation like those of collapse and death.*"

There follow statements analogous to these regarding love.

In the first place, there is no love but passionate love.

And love, the passion, embodies much melancholy. To treat of love Madame de Staël has not troubled herself to consider the history of the world. She has her own impressions to consult. She dreams rather than analyses.

MADAME DE STAËL

In love it is one chance to a thousand that you are happy.

You are fascinated by the externals of personality ; you fall in love with the mind, the person, the enchanting ways of someone, and little by little the humiliating conviction grows on you that you have given your love to someone unworthy of it, someone neither wicked nor cruel, but simply a nullity, "barren of deep or acute emotions." Or again, if he is not contemptible, he turns unfaithful, and, while feeling yourself "that you own emotion *must communicate itself to him*," you learn that he is amusing himself with a rival, and immediately "the joyous life of your being turns to death, a living death."

"Jealousy renders you frantic."

You long for vengeance and are ashamed of the longing.

Finally, jealousy repents and "devours itself," and you fall into complete depression.

There remain the chances of life, which are small things certainly, compared to inner security, but which, nevertheless, at certain times have the air of entering into a conspiracy against the life of the beloved one.

What a career of misfortune !

Only those should enter upon it "who have enough resolution to commit suicide if need be."

Death of soul or body lies in ambush on all the paths of love.

And especially for women. Love is only an episode in a man's life. "'Tis woman's whole existence."

And this is so in spite of themselves, because of their very virtues, because they are faithful, tender and devoted, where man is capricious, hard and egoistical.

There is no justice from man to woman.

"They may pass as good men in the world, and yet

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

cause a woman the most excruciating anguish that the human heart can endure; they may pass as faithful and yet betray her; *and, finally, they may have received from a woman the services and marks of devotion which inalienably bind comrades and brothers-in-arms, who would be dishonoured if they were capable of trespassing against these bonds; yes, men may receive all this from a woman, and fling it away, sizing it all up as her passion; as if one feeling, or one gift the more, diminished the value of the rest.*"*

That is meant for Narbonne.

But let us suppose another baleful possibility.

Let us suppose the existence in one soul of both these passions, Love and the Thirst for Glory, when one alone is enough to fill a human existence with pain.

What can be the result for the unique example of this malign fate?

Not only the probability of misfortune, but certain and perpetual pain!

For not only are both these passions baleful, taken separately, but they are incompatible!

That is what Madame de Staël states in the chapter on Fame.

"The power of loving with passion is withdrawn from those who have long been dominated by the determination to win Fame.

"The reflections one is obliged to make on men in general in the course of public life make it impossible to entertain those illusions which alone can make one elevate a certain individual to a pinnacle apart from the rest."

She repeats it in the chapter on Love.

"Men like to submit their mistresses to the ascendancy of their own abilities, *and so they often hesitate between the boredom they must suffer with an average woman, and the importunities which are probable from a remarkable woman.*"

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

And, finally, she devotes nearly a whole chapter to this consideration, the chapter on Vanity, which is in many respects the most curious to read and is, perhaps, the best part of the book.

It begins with a few "portraits" which, though more firmly touched in and more biting in satire, recall the imitations of La Bruyère of her girlhood's Journal.

Lycidas, the old bureaucrat who "confides as a secret what is already printed in the newspapers"; who has a habit of concluding his remarks "with a look of tremendous concentration"; whose pockets are stuffed with letters from Ministers which "comment on the weather," and whose chief pride is a certain "often-repeated diatribe against wit which is nearly always applauded by the majority of the company"; is almost certainly to be recognised as a phlegmatic Swiss acquaintance of Madame de Staël, who had been uncourteous enough to put his compatriots on their guard against the particular line in which she excelled.

It was not the last time that Madame de Staël took her revenge in this way.

But for the moment she has more important matters on hand; she does not insist, but shapes her course straight for the problem which touches her vitally.

She considers that vanity is women's own passion. There is no woman without vanity.

Even in the case of distinguished women, this petty passion comes between them and everything they lack and want to have.

"For, whatever the power and range of her mind, whatever the importance of the affairs that absorb her, a woman's face is always either an obstacle or an object of passionate cult in her life. Men, or, at any rate, their male natures, have willed it thus."

This is not the point which interests Madame de Staël most. The problem of love and fame fascinates

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

her so much that in order to get back to it she now classifies the desire for fame as a form of vanity. A change of opinion? Oh, no! Just another shade of meaning attached to the idea. She says:

"Directly women want to participate in more extended and dazzling operations than those arising from their gentle arts in the circles about them, they aim at some success gratifying to vanity." This alienates the sympathies of men.

"The more men are determined to judge a woman by the standards of her sex, the more they detest the idea that she can embrace a career contrary to the nature of the eternal feminine." And again:

"Do you think that dazzling success in a woman is particularly gratifying to her lover?"

For "enthusiasm born of this sort of success does not last so long as that founded on more ordinary and frivolous attractions."

"Criticism destroys the illusions, through which, to look her best, a woman should be seen."

"Love is more in love with what it gives than what it finds."

"Man piques himself on the superiority of his own being and, like Pygmalion, he will only prostrate himself before his own handiwork."

But could not a woman of genius succeed in emancipating herself from her sex, rejecting homage when she cannot decide whether it is offered to her as a woman, or to the "man nature" in her womanhood?

There is no supposition more vain than this.

"A woman cannot be self-sufficing.

"Even Fame is not enough support for her; and the unchangeable fragility of her nature, and the weakness of her position in the social order, has burdened her with a daily dependence from which immortal genius could not deliver her.

"A woman is not the less a woman, but the more, when she is a genius.

MADAME DE STAËL

"She will never quite acquire the stability of a masculine head-piece.

"If she devotes herself to Euclid, her logic is not free from emotion.

"Imagination will always be the greatest of her faculties; her talents may gain by the fact, but this vividness of imagination is invariably accompanied by agitated emotions; her feelings must be swayed by her illusions."

"Sensitive and versatile women will always shew examples of that bizarre combination of error and exactitude, of that sort of inspiration of the mind which delivers oracles to the world, while it bungles personal affairs."

"And their crowning misfortune is to be found in the petty jealousy to which they are subjected by reserve behind reserve, of the army of their own sex."

Those from whom the advantages of a great mind are for ever withheld will find a thousand little ways of attacking them when it is a woman who possesses them.

"A merely pretty woman hopes to draw attention to her own advantages by running down intelligence. A woman who thinks herself remarkable for her prudence and common sense, and never having had two ideas in her head, wishes to pass as a person who has rejected everything which is conspicuous by its absence from her mental equipment, such a woman will burst out of her habitual mental sterility to cover with ridicule the woman whose wit colours and varies the conversation; and mothers of daughters who judge (and with some reason) that the triumphs of wit are not likely to advance their daughters in life, rejoice over the attack on the woman who has triumphed by her mind."

Unhappy through Fame! Unhappy through Love!
Doubly unhappy!

It is refined and immeasurable torture which is

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

constantly renewed if one thirsts, at one and the same time, for glory and for the love which it excludes.

The lesson is obvious !

One must live humbly apart, avoiding the whirlpool of affairs and society life. Above all, avoid Love like the plague, and re-create an inner tranquillity by force of abstinence.

Madame de Staël sees that this is the logical solution.

But will she adopt it ?

Let us see what follows :

What is fame ? What is love ?

The quest for one or the other is enough to fill a whole life, and the quest of both together is anguish, betrayal, death by torture, but it is also life, unique, palpitating, breathing life.

Next to the sublime height of virtue which makes a human being rule his conduct by his conscience (Madame de Staël dismisses this as a sublimity because she considers it unattainable), the finest principle which can move us is the thirst for glory.

Given the possession of some marked talent which you desire to cultivate, you should make a contract with your country something after this fashion :

“ I consecrate my talents to your service ; my dominating passion will incessantly incite me to make a greater and greater number of men benefit by the happy result of my efforts, my country and my nation will have rights in the fruits of my labour . . . the only price of this devotion that I ask, is that my country should celebrate it ; *let Fame be the expression of your gratitude.*”

Yes, virtue may be its own reward, but that reward becomes intoxicating when you have filled the universe with the sound of your name, when you have the sensation of fulfilling “ an existence ” outside yourself.

The soul is filled with pride and pleasure by the constant pressure of a feeling that the thoughts of a

MADAME DE STAËL

great number of men are turned towards you. The acclamation of the crowd, the thoughts which it arouses, and the commotion which it excites in you, stir your soul to its depths.

The paths which lead to this great end are filled with fascination.

The occupations which stimulate your ardour to attain the end are joys in themselves.

And of the two sources of fame, "creative art" and "action," the latter is to be preferred, according to Madame de Staël.

"The first, which borrows something from the pleasures of seclusion, participates in its benefits, but it is not that inspiration which sets alight every single aspect of this great passion, the thirst for glory. That is not the dominating genius which at one and the same time sows, reaps and crowns itself ; the genius whose compelling energy and overwhelming courage decides in one instant the fate of empires and centuries. The genius of action is spared the delay of tardy justice which long years may bring. His glory marches close ahead of him, like that pillar of fire which illumined the advance of the Israelites by night.

"Celebrity won by literature is rarely contemporary . . . it is not within the scope of such a career to drive home a complete realization of its power, physical and moral power ; or to assure itself the exercise of all its faculties, as the genius of action does, finally intoxicated by the certainty of its own incomparable force."

In the pursuit of glory, action is the winning sphere, because it is the most immediate in giving fulfilment ; it leads, not to happiness, but to intoxication, by the fusion of mind and senses in ecstasy.

But this is nothing to what follows. Love is quite another matter. In dealing with love, Madame de Staël is obliged to hold on to her own skirts, which threaten to carry her away in a hurricane of en-

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

thusiasm, borrowed from the time when she was forcing herself to analyse her idol, Jean-Jacques, with cold deliberation.

In the pursuit of glory and ambition, in the exercise of fanaticism, enthusiasm rises and falls ; only Love can fill every instant of life with intoxication.

There is no exhausting this inexhaustible source of happy ideas and emotions, and while you see and experience everything through another's being, the whole universe is the beloved, in different forms.

Spring, nature, the skies are all regions where he has passed ; the pleasures of society are *his* pleasures, his sayings, his doings. Your own success which really gratifies you is the praise which he heard, or the general admiration which added zest to his admiration.

Who talks of virtue ? Why, Love *is* virtue.

Is it not true that real love is " all sacrifice, kindness, mercy, and self-forgetfulness."

And to define happiness ? Love is happiness.

" It is the highest ideal of felicity that the imagination of man can conceive ; a felicity more exquisite still, almost terrifying in its bliss if the perfect lovers are united in marriage, which makes it unique, lifted to a giddy elevation of joy.

" And to think that this bliss is within the scope of human experience, *and that almost every living soul is debarred from it !* "

As for the women of genius who are dealt with in the chapter on Vanity, a few get the better of their difficulties ; not without experiencing " the inevitable unhappiness attached to their destinies," but succeeding in counter-balancing this with the force of their genius.

" Chance brings a few exceptions. If there are some souls carried away, either by talents or character, they will perhaps differ from the general rule and the palms of glory may one day crown them."

MADAME DE STAËL

And with reference to the burning question of the incompatibility of love and fame, there is a compromise which may save women of sensitive feeling, who are also determined to have a part in the business of life.

This is it :

"When their share of public affairs is born of love for the man who directs those affairs, when feeling alone dictates their opinions and inspires their procedure, they are not straying from the road laid down for them by Nature ; they are women, and they are in love."

A little further on we light on this passage :

"Perhaps at this very moment of writing I wish to be loved once more, perhaps at this very moment I resign my destiny to my love."

THE SOLUTION

We have seen that, though it is a serious malady, the patient is not going to die.

Madame de Staël gives the impression that she suffers far more from too much vitality than too little.

And we cannot but recognise that she seems to recount the symptoms with a sort of lingering pleasure, like some strange patient who does not dislike his illness.

Of the remedies which she has already tried, three are quite useless.

They are friendship ; filial, parental and conjugal affection ; and religion.

For Madame de Staël friendship is a sort of offshoot of love which offers all the same disadvantages and none of the same compensations.

The ancients have handed down a legend of placid fraternity which was good enough for the battered souls of warriors free from all modern complexities.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

Such a friendship still exists between "cold-blooded beings" who "consecrate a certain day of the week to friendship, arrange exactly what amount of influence it is to have in their own well-being, and perform all the acts of friendship just as they would perform a duty."

Friendship, as Madame de Staël conceives of it, is a transfusion of enthusiasms, a most ambiguous emotion, which loses a good deal of any worth it may possess through sheer ambiguity.

Love can be isolated, or, rather, by its very force it isolates itself.

While friendship seems like a sort of embryo love which you never succeed in disentangling from the web of circumstances; friends are potential lovers whom you only meet in the street.

Friendship is an unhappy mixture of business and sentiment, difficult of accomplishment between men, and almost impossible between women, who are rival competitors rather than allies by nature, and govern the actions of every-day life from the point of view of success in their sex-relations, far more than men do.

Friendship between a man and a woman is rarely possible or genuine because there is "a natural exactingness between two people of opposite sex, which (perhaps without their perceiving it) is demanding with gradually rising insistence, perhaps only in one party, or perhaps in both, what only passion can give."

In any case, friendship disappoints one's demands on it, and never defines what one may count on.

"You try to make it suffice for everything, and become exceedingly discontented at the blank you feel. Seeking to account for it, you accuse your friend of a want of warmth, and when you do accomplish friendship of mutual intensity, you become mutually tired of the reciprocal exactions of the sentiment, for only love, the passion, can compensate for loss of independence."

MADAME DE STAËL

It is this fact which makes family affection negligible in the pursuit of happiness. One would have expected to find Necker's daughter blowing the family trumpet to celebrate the sense of intimate union which should bind the members of a family together.

But we find nothing of the sort. This is the frankest and least romantic chapter in the book.

It is of inestimable value in furnishing evidence about Madame de Staël's connection with de Narbonne from its very beginnings, and also because it addresses a reproof to parents (managed with regard to paternal susceptibilities) for the mania for authority which besets and spoils the affection of parents for their children.

It is a two-fold evil.

On the one hand, according to Madame de Staël, the sentiment is of a usurping and invading character; on the other, all feelings from the heart pre-suppose equality.

"Thus the same principles apply to this form of affection as to all feelings of the heart, your soul is sufficiently implicated to make an imperious demand for reciprocity, and so repose is done for, and uneasiness begins."

All the more fatally so because, if in love, the passion, the rule is that "the one who loves most encroaches upon the independence of the other," parental affection makes pretensions to a sort of tacit sovereignty, "a veiled dignity," an authority which, though it may be innocent and benevolent enough, cannot escape being irritating.

Affection wilts under such treatment, which is hostile to its levelling tendencies.

"The heart becomes wounded and withdraws itself if pretensions to superiority are kept up."

As the child emancipates itself gradually from parental authority, the parents can with difficulty conceal their displeasure, even if the progress is

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

gratifying, and cannot be expected to conceal it if the new departures take a direction of which they cannot approve.

Different generations, in the natural order of things, being called upon to exist side by side, we find parents and children, who are united by reciprocal affection, forgetting how very different their points of view are and necessarily must be.

The mirror which reverses the objects it presents does not distort things so much as the ruling spirit of generation, which relegates things either to the future or to the past.

There is the same realism and detached analysis in the observations on conjugal relations which follow, and which curiously illustrate the curious duality of Madame de Staël's nature. Here we are dealing with the calculating mind which found it possible to accept the marriage of convenience with the Swedish diplomat, and which, later, rejected the idea of marriage with Constant.

"No one can tell in advance what a lengthy business one day of married life may be; if we observe carefully the varied impressions produced by what is rightly called life in the *ménage* (*i.e.*, that which is managed), we must admit that every instant of the day bothers and difficulties crop up, which are certain to destroy any romantic quality in feeling; *it is, therefore, of all ties, the least likely to create or preserve the finest flower of romantic love.**

"In order to preserve any peace in this relation, you must have immense self-control and make use of strength and self-sacrifice, which resemble a sort of monastic discipline far more than the joys of passion."

This disposes of the personal relationships. She now turns to religion. She finds less help than ever in this direction.

Unwilling to confess frankly her complete in-

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

difference to any dogmatic creed, Necker's daughter gets out of the difficulty by assaulting the Voltairean bugbear of narrow dogma in religion, with her hardest blows.

Blind devotion is no remedy : it can satisfy neither heart nor mind.

" People sometimes offer vexatious resistance to expansive qualities in others ; but religious devotion is in perpetual conflict with ' natural qualities.' "

" In so far as these qualities are spontaneous and involuntary they are incompatible with fixed rules.

" Religious devotion has great inconveniences for passionate characters."

Not that she really confounds religion with creeds.

Just as she observed in her *Essai sur les Fictions* that the morality of a deep feeling leaves duty far behind in importance, so she observes here " that natural qualities, developed by the principles and feelings of morality, are vastly superior to the virtues of religious rule."

" *True religion is like beauty and genius.* One either has it, or one has not, and, therefore, can never have it. There is no more to be said in the matter."

That is certainly a way of closing the discussion.

" Passions create moral malady, and because one is passionate, religion is useless as a cure."

So be it ! That is not logic. But it is a way of arguing which is permissible among the palpable inconsistencies of life.

Religion certainly was not of any practical use to Madame de Staël in the solution of her problem.

However, not forgetting the part she must play as educator of the public, she advises that religious faith should be employed to fill the gap left in the energies of the populace by the end of the Revolution.

Little by little, Madame de Staël is being led to find in herself alone, the remedies she cannot find elsewhere.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

This surely is not a bad idea, as the seat of the malady is herself.

But there is a tremendous obstacle in the way.

Madame de Staël in approaching herself is confronted by Madame de Staël.

It is an extremely delicate situation.

Madame de Staël is prepared to amend her own character, and Madame de Staël forbids a single thought against herself.

We are no longer surprised that family ties and religion were summarily dismissed.

Madame de Staël dismisses Madame de Staël.

The misfortune lies in her own character, but Madame de Staël forbids her own thoughts to admit it.

If anything, or anyone, should advise her to moderate her character in any way, above all, to weaken or lower it, even to procure her a little pleasure, she would be all furious protestation.

She would no longer be herself.

There would be no problem, but there would be no Madame de Staël. Thank you !

Then, since other people have something to do with her griefs by responding very little to her need of living in their lives, why should she not build up some fortification against the shocks of life, by erecting a barrier of the necessary egoism in her own being.

But has she not made it clear that passionate souls are not egoistic. They cannot be.

An ambitious man is an egoist, because his heart is cold. But altruism is implied in any passionate soul. She writes :

“ Passionate characters are never egoistic. I shall be told that it is their own happiness which they seek with so much impetuosity ! So it is, but they seek it outside themselves ; they will expose themselves to any risk to obtain it ; for their personalities never contain that combination of caution and sensuality which calms the soul instead of agitating it.”

MADAME DE STAËL

Finally—"your personality, whether you look upon it as a blessing or a curse, is entirely independent of your will."

Madame de Staël looks upon her own as a mixture of blessing and curse, but for no consideration would she have exchanged it for someone else's.

In short, she is not far from believing that it is the excess of genuine high quality in her character, which is the cause of all her misfortunes.

She is unhappy, because she is too good for her surroundings.

That is why she refuses all external aid.

She will allow no one but herself to meddle with so great a matter, and she will not allow herself to do much.

She suggests to herself an appeal to the fundamental virtue which is in her, that she shall mould herself for every day life in the likeness of that angel she can be at moments.

She will make use of her super-moral personality to effect this change.

This responsibility, which is infringing on the powers of the Christian religion, she takes upon herself, fully accepting the Christian ideal for that matter.

She knows the virtues of Christianity. They are primarily, generosity, kindness and mercy.

She proposes to raise herself to the height of absolute beneficence, perpetual kindness and mercy, which are sublime in their disinterestedness.

A whole chapter, the fourth in the section on remedies, is devoted to the subject of benevolence, and the book of the *Passions* winds up with a passage in praise of mercy, a virtue which is much to be recommended to revolutionaries.

Madame de Staël has only to recall those blessed intervals in the darkest days, when the news of some potential victim's escape and rescue arrived at Coppet.

"How happy is the man or woman!" she cries, her

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

heart still swelling with maternal pride, "who has saved the life of a man or woman !

"The feeling of being useless is done away with, and weariness with self is all forgotten !

"Kindness or benevolence considered in an abstract manner, is not only the highest virtue from which (as from love, a special form of it) all the other virtues are derived, but it procures for sensitive souls all the same 'joys of emotion,' as love, though in a purer and less dangerous form."

And here is another aspect of the question which is not negligible.

When we come to analyse the joys of benevolence we find that they are closely allied to another source of peculiar enjoyment, *the consciousness of one's own power.*

Madame de Staël remarks on this twice on the same page, from which we may conclude that she attaches a good deal of importance to it.

"Unlike ambition, benevolence demands no return for its effects, but at the same time it offers us an opportunity for widening our own lives and for influencing many others."

And again lower down :

"However destitute and obscure our position may be, acts of kindness to others enlarge the possibilities of that position and the performance of them gives us at least one attribute of power, influence over others."

The advantage of this cure is evidently that it suits the invalid's character.

She suffers from hyper-sensitiveness.

The right way to deal with that she thinks is not to attempt to extirpate it, but rather, since it is the exaggeration of it which is dangerous, to moderate it, to hold it in a leash.

Characters which have too much ardour would do well to adopt the habit of "conceiving of life in a passive manner," of telling themselves resolutely that

MADAME DE STAËL

positive happiness is unattainable, after which they would be more disposed "to be satisfied with something that resembles it."

Above all, while young and joyous, they should acquire the habit of believing that unhappiness really exists and is not only a "bogey," used to discipline naughty children, but a terrific reality, which endures instead of passing away; whose weight increases instead of diminishing; and we must all bear it alone, whether we would or no, because it is impossible to talk about it as much as we are forced to think about it.

"And since passionate souls are poised for the onrush forward, they should not attempt to live the past, present and future in one; the real wisdom for them is to live like children, who take life, drop by drop, as it comes; to live from day to day and to pass down the river of life with their eyes fixed on the banks, rather than turned towards the end."

This "theory of negative happiness" is particularly useful after a love-storm.

This treatment does not pretend to anticipate the malady, it is retrospective, but certainly does not consist in elegiac enjoyment of the consequences of the storm.

The cure consists in renouncing all happiness.

Resignation of this description is bound to be attended with melancholy . . . well . . . the melancholy is not as bad as one expected!

The more utterly one gives way to it, the more enjoyable it becomes.

Above all there must be no abrupt changes in the cure.

It is the instinct of unhappy people to isolate themselves, but many find that, instead of alleviating pain, solitude exasperates it.

"The first few moments of abandonment to solitary contemplation are full of charm, but you would end by eating your heart out, if you went on in that way."

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

You find that the full force of your grief rushes back on you, increased by the tranquillity which is in such painful contrast to the turmoil within.

This then, is the moment to seek distraction.

It is an indispensable intermediate stage in the cure.

But once you can feel sure that you can face a tête-à-tête with yourself, without danger of a relapse, you will soon arrive at the knowledge "*that solitude is an inestimable blessing*, especially for the philosophical," and the great tranquillity of Nature herself becomes a beneficent agent in this last phase of a passion which resolves itself into quiet melancholy.

Aspect and life in the country are so well adapted to this state of the moral being, that we are tempted to believe that Providence desires all men to arrive at it, and that all things work together to inspire it in men when they are weary of the struggles of existence, and ask nothing more of life, but the absence of actual pain.

All Nature seems to lend itself to the feelings he experiences then.

The sighing of the wind, the roaring of storms, the strange, sweet potency of a summer evening, the glitter of white hoar-frost in winter, all lull the soul of man to mournful peace, which is the consequence of the events of his destiny, *and is the only condition of the human heart which leaves perfect freedom to the mind for contemplation.*

Ah ! if her own case had only been a matter of being sensitive, or rather hypersensitive.

How easily she could have effected a cure.

If only she could abandon herself to elegiac contemplation, if she could only succeed in drifting voluptuously down the river of life, looking only to left and right, and never to the end ! Then there would be no need to discuss a malady on paper, which would never have come into existence.

But as she has told us, already, she cannot be happy without fame.

MADAME DE STAËL

She is a force, and a force in motion !

Did she wish to come to a standstill, she could not accomplish it.

Deep in her soul her emotions are in perpetual strife with her mind.

There is a burden of inner anguish which she drags with her wherever she goes, which makes her almost tired of life.

Sometimes she would like to rest, to go away, heaven knows where . . . to disappear !

And then she knows that she wants to be in action, to dominate men.

"O God !" she cries in the *Passions*, "when chance has brought about that combination of mind and acute sensitiveness which is fatal to happiness, do not abandon those unhappy beings who are given the power of perceiving and understanding everything, and are at the same time made to suffer everything. We who suffer and *know* ! Uphold our mental powers to the level of our emotions and inspirations.

"Give light to our path from the same fire which consumes us !"

"No form of meditation or contemplation," she concludes, "can give happiness in eternal inertia."

Then what is to be done ?

There is nothing for it but action, the exploitation of one's faculties. She knows only too well that the possession of mind leads naturally to the pursuit of glory and thence to passion and grief.

That is all she discovers when she seeks a remedy in herself. She is in a trap.

She is to find unhappiness in idleness, in action, in herself and outside herself.

The only thing she can do is to patch up a compromise, an adjustment of two irreducible forces which will allow her to live divided between her two conquerors.

Torturing sensibility can be reduced to gentle

WINDING UP THE CRISIS

melancholy if you set about it in the right way, and, in the same way, a too active intelligence, which is inimical to peace of mind, may be administered with more economy and vigilance.

Its rapid currents may be diverted into specially prepared canals, where they will flow more peacefully and nearer to one's own being.

One can think, read and write for one's own pleasure, and in that way mind and emotion may be harnessed to the same yoke.

"There is a sort of intimate pleasure in the pleasure of sheer thought and in enriching one's own mind from that of others, which is connected with the need for action and the need of making for perfection in all things."

At the same time, Madame de Staël might find shelter for her tormented soul in the smiling peace of the garden of philosophy; she might try to convert herself into a child of another century and become a quiet student of the Renaissance period, instead of the feverish child of the Revolution that she is.

It might be possible—for a short time. For she is anything and everything by turns.

It is not impossible that she might be able to create this desired state of truce in herself.

But before that could be attained she would have to use up her energy, get old, wear herself out, for the fact was that her malady was derived from a superabundance of vitality.

Let us listen to the conclusion of her reflections on the benefits of study.

"Whether engaged in reading or writing, you give your mind the sensation of accomplishing something which defines its scope and displays its exactitude, and this agreeable sensation is quite unconnected with self-approbation. It is actual, like the pleasure of an athlete in bodily exercise which is in proportion to his powers."

MADAME DE STAËL

Will she stop at that ?

The realization of the extent of her own powers, which she acquires from the easy accomplishment of intellectual exercises, rapidly produces another sensation in her, a sensation of movement.

“ It is in making some intellectual advancement from day to day, that the consciousness of one’s own moral existence becomes a happy and vital feeling.”

She cannot feel this without wanting to communicate the idea to others, without imagining that other people also enjoy it, or ought to enjoy it, and so, at the end of the book on the *Passions*, we find ourselves led up to the inevitable complement to personal pessimism in her case, that is a firm belief in the actual progress of humanity.

“ From the exercise of his mental faculties man receives an enhanced belief in the immortality of the soul.”

To put it differently :

“ Thought . . . advances by a sort of established progression . . . whose end is not in sight.”

This is the leaping-off point for her next book : *De la Littérature*.

CHAPTER XII

POLITICAL INTERVENTION. NEW ATTEMPTS AT ACTION.
A SCHEME FOR A CONSTITUTION, 1796-1799

WHILST Madame de Staël was drawing up the balance-sheet of her woes and virtues at Coppet, aimed partly at the members of the Directoire, those gentlemen were in Paris, well-content to be rid of her many importunities, and they were taking rather energetic measures to block the road of her return.

Madame de Staël had arrived at Coppet at the beginning of January, 1796, fully intending to work, but her method of working was always very much mixed up with her social activities.

She could work in Paris quite as well as at Coppet, sometimes better, for she had not the smallest need of isolation to achieve mental concentration.

She only meant to stay with her father for three or four months.

The Directoire succeeded in keeping her there until the end of the year.

As was always the case, she furnished them gratuitously with pretexts.

Desportes, the French resident at Geneva, used to send reports that she was openly receiving suspects, who were either emissaries of Condé's army, or spies in the service of England.

Her public opinions, too, were ill-defined.

She gave out that she was a whole-hearted Republican and that she was absolutely loyal to the Directoire.

But, either at Lausanne, or at Coppet, for she was always moving about, she welcomed to her house, not only natives, but exiles of every shade of political

MADAME DE STAËL

opinion, Royalists as well as Republicans, and she was certainly rather more cordial to the former than to the latter.

The Royalists were seen to be "chatting and laughing with her in the embrasure of a window, while the Republicans were having a dull time, standing waiting humbly until their hostess should remember their existence."

It was decided in Paris that, taken at her best, "this woman was a chameleon, indefinable and incomprehensible in the eyes of the public," and that, therefore, "the Directoire would do well to be on its guard against her."

When May came, she decided to rejoin her husband, who had kept his position as Swedish Ambassador in Paris.

She was making preparations to start when her agents (for she also had agents) informed her that the Directoire was taking measures to stop her further progress at the frontier.

In a way, it was a false alarm. They meant to arrest her, but they wanted possession of papers which she was suspected of desiring to carry secretly to Paris, and did not mean to deprive her of personal liberty.

At the same time, she learnt that the affair was no secret, as all the customs officers and police agencies were in possession of a printed list in which her name appeared.*

Instead of laughing at this official ineptitude as, no doubt, she would have done if she had really been guilty, Madame de Staël nearly suffocated with indignation.

She wrote to Desportes and she wrote to her husband.†

The inhabitants of Lausanne and Geneva simply revelled in the public humiliation inflicted on the woman who never ceased to make them feel their own

* See Note. Appendix C.

† See Note. Appendix C.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

insignificance, and the Royalist exiles joined heartily in the same sentiment, for in spite of Desportes' reports, they detested her more even than they had in the past.

She felt the affront all the more acutely because all her political ambition was bubbling up again and she had lately come to the conclusion that it was her duty to collaborate with the Directoire and to help on their cause.

This she gave anybody to understand who would listen. The Directoire had heard about it, but did not believe in it and, in any case, did not wish for her collaboration.

However, faithful to her manifesto, she wrote on the subject to Constant who had edited, under her direction, her political declaration of faith, before he left for Paris. It was entitled, "*Concerning the strength of the present government and the necessity of supporting it.*"

The situation became complicated in the month of August, after she had sent the manuscript of the *Passions*, with the preface which exposed her deception, to the printers.

M. de Staël arrived one fine day at Coppet deprived of his ambassadorial functions, and also without means of subsistence, which did not tend to lessen the irritation of his legitimate spouse.

He found Constant there, exercising the privileges of "husband in office" which, indeed, did not surprise M. de Staël, but neither did it sweeten his humour.

There was nothing to be done, but to wait until the publication of the *Passions* at last enlightened the Directoire as to the true character of their victim.

The book appeared at the beginning of October,* and in order that it should not pass unnoticed, or fail to make an effect, Constant took copies to Paris in person, and Roederer gave it a very favourable review

* See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

(though with a dash of inevitable pedantry) in the *Journal de Paris* of November 22nd.

It cannot be said that the *Passions* regained any public favour for the author.

The public was indifferent, the Directoire had no settled policy and had very fixed intentions with regard to Madame de Staël.

However, the Directoire gave way.

In December, 1776, Constant came to tell her that the Directoire would consent to tolerate her residence in France, though this was not to be considered authorisation.

The conditions were that she was not to get herself talked about and that she was not to live within eight leagues of the capital.

She installed herself at Hérivaux in a house recently acquired by Constant and, without being too punctilious, she disposed herself to live, more or less, the life that had been required of her, if she came into France.

She was again expecting a child, and during the last months of her pregnancy she supervised some fresh lucubrations of her political pupil on *Lès Effets de la Térreure* and *Réactions Politiques*, pamphlets which openly lay stress on the authority of the government, and which (especially the latter) find a good deal of fault with the ideas cherished by Madame de Staël. *Réactions Politiques* deals with the part played by men and women of letters in the Republic.

In the month of June, between two conversations, as it were, Madame de Staël gave birth to a daughter, Albertine, "who bore a striking resemblance to M. Benjamin Constant, in feature, colour of hair, and indeed, in every way, so that no one could mistake the likeness."*

But not for an instant did she move her eagle glance from the course of political events.

To gather the essence of the situation we have only

* See Note. Appendix C.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

to refer to the second volume of her *Considérations sur la Révolution Française*, and in order to be in a position to exercise the necessary control, we must first understand that the chapters dealing with events preceding and following the 18th *fructidor*, and, indeed, the whole of the *Considérations* were not composed simultaneously with events, but a long time afterwards when implacable history had already exacted the inevitable consequences from events.

Madame de Staël, however, has only consulted her memories.

She took notes from a pamphlet in manuscript, almost weighty enough to be called a volume, which she had dashed off not long after the climax of the Revolution, but which remained unpublished and has never been printed until quite recently.

It is quite clear that she made use of it.

But the pamphlet itself was not written until after the crisis.

It appears from the *Considérations* that Madame de Staël approved of the national work accomplished by the Directoire in the first year and a half of its existence.

The finances of the country were set in order, paper money was withdrawn, the liberty of the press was assured, and security for travel re-established.

It was even to be hoped that, little by little, the persecution of priests and the proscription of nobles would be abandoned.

She does not offer objections of principle in opposition to the government.

She considers it an imperfect machine, but it is capable of improvement. It may be made perfect.

It is only a question of recalling certain revolutionary laws and of making an exact definition of the attributes of each of the constituent parties.

There are two ways of doing that ; intervention from above and intervention from below.

MADAME DE STAËL

Unfortunately for success in the first method, the only member of the Directoire whom Madame de Staël knew personally was Barras.

By means of his intervention she got Talleyrand appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs in July, 1797.* But they would have nothing to do with her Benjamin.

In this direction progress was slow.

Moreover, a breath of reaction stirred and blew over the country.

Madame de Staël was not sorry to see the Jacobins reduced to hopeless confusion and dismay.

The moderate Royalists, to whom she had addressed her reflections on civil peace in 1795, were getting more and more power.

They demanded the reform of the same abuses which had irritated her own sense of justice and, thanks to the elections, they gradually acquired considerable power in the Council of the Five Hundred and seemed inclined to operate according to Madame de Staël's ideas.

Added to that, it was a fact that a good number of them were personal friends of hers.

She may have thought that the Directoire would die a natural death in this manner.

Certain passages in the *Considérations* lead one to suppose so.

In any case, she counted on the speedy disappearance from the Directoire of those members of the Convention who had been transferred to it, a disappearance which should take place without any fuss, and would certainly clear the field for the future.

But the whole-hearted Royalists were too confident.

On the 18 *fructidor* (4th September), General Augereau, called in by the Directoire, broke in upon the Councils and arrested all the flower of the opposition.

It was the end of a reign of tolerance, far too brief.

The proscriptions and condemnations were resumed and more forcibly carried out than ever.

* See Note. Appendix C.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

The newspapers, hastily taking service under tyranny again, denounced Madame de Staël as an active anti-Republican.

She understood that explanations would not help her, and prepared to retire to Switzerland again.

Before leaving she had her first interview with the youngest and most celebrated general of the Republic, who had returned, crowned with laurels, from the Italian campaign.

It was said that "Bonaparte was a most unusual type of general, having nothing of the usual revolutionary harshness in his composition, being tenderly in love with his wife, and melting to the ethereal beauty of Ossiau in his leisure moments." "He was admired," said Madame de Staël, by way of excusing herself, "because at the moment no one knew what to admire."

And yet, even before 18 *fructidor*, Madame de Staël had written enthusiastic letters to Bonaparte in Italy. And why not?

Always on the watch for talent, she could not fail to be interested in his.

Divining what the future would bring forth, Talleyrand kept close to this phenomenon, the incalculable young general.

Through Talleyrand Madame de Staël informed Bonaparte that Benjamin Constant was a man of high ability.

As for herself, she felt a slight disappointment in the first moments of her meeting with Bonaparte.

This was no Narbonne. It was a small, pale, weary-looking young man.

In talking to him she was strangely ill at ease.

The hero-soul closed itself against her.

Bonaparte was naturally aware that she was not on good terms with his lords and masters of the Directoire and behaved accordingly.

But, curious to relate, an emanation of terror

MADAME DE STAËL

passed out of him, communicating itself to her hypersensitive perceptions even when he neither moved nor spoke.

Seized with "a very pronounced sensation of fear," Madame de Staël, for the first time in her life, found nothing to say.

We may measure her personal force by the fact that it required Bonaparte to achieve that. By the same means we may measure his.

She writes: "I felt confusedly that no emotion of the heart could move him against his will."*

She did not, however, immediately withdraw her admiration, and his reticence only provoked a keener curiosity in her.

The Directoire was projecting an invasion of Switzerland on the pretext that the *canton* of Vaud must be liberated.

This invasion would have threatened Necker with death and ruin, as he was on the list of the proscribed, and his revenue was derived from feudal dues on his estates.

Shut up alone for an hour with Bonaparte, who this time "listened kindly and patiently," Necker's daughter combated the proposed invasion with all the energy at her command, laying stress on the "happy condition and beauty of Helvetia," and "the peace of it, which it would be criminal to destroy."

She was wasting her time.

The future Consul merely borrowed a few words from her rich vocabulary to reply in the name of the heads of the Republic that the peaceable citizens of Helvetia must be endowed with political rights.

After which he went on to converse amiably about "his taste for seclusion, country-life, and the fine arts."

Thus, at the end of January, 1798, Madame de Staël went back to Switzerland to await the danger with her father and her children.

* See Note. Appendix C.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

Her worst fears were soon dissipated as Marshal Suchet was commissioned by the Directoire to offer Necker a safe-conduct.

The Marshal made Coppet his staff headquarters and installed himself there and Madame de Staël was duly thankful for this God-send in misfortune.

She continued to follow the march of events in Paris by means of Constant's letters.

The Jacobins were seething on one side and the Royalists on the other, and the Directoire, still violent and despotic, maintained its perilous equilibrium between them, dealing blows first to right and then to left.

The muddle, it seemed, was to be indefinitely prolonged and the ideal Republic was further off than ever.

Switzerland did not complain very bitterly of the French proselytes and Madame de Staël's indignation was dissipated under evidence.

By the reunion of Geneva with France, Necker became a French citizen.

This made it all the more urgent to strike his name off the list of proscribed exiles.

Madame de Staël only waited until the effervescence of the May elections was past.

These elections were only a *coup d'état* on the part of the Directoire.

She went back to Paris in June, or about that time, and put her father's documents into the hands of the Directoire, where it was decided unanimously that his name should be struck off the list of the proscribed.

M. de Staël had meanwhile made up his mind that he would no longer compromise his ambassadorial prospects by connecting himself further with the pranks of a woman who was only his wife in name and now refused to supply him with funds.

He regretfully played his last card. He divorced her.

MADAME DE STAËL

Necker was very angry. But Madame de Staël was far from the day when so small an infliction could move her in the least.

Judging that she had acquired a right to the name she had made illustrious, she determined to keep it.

During this year she divided herself between France and Swizerland, not able to decide where to settle. She could not see how to attack the problem.

The slightest approach to intervention would have been dangerous, very dangerous ; and, moreover, she did not know how to intervene.

In November she was at Coppet, in January at Geneva, where she attempted to get Constant nominated as deputy in the Five Hundred.

Finally, she decided to put into a written work all that she might not carry out in action. She wrote the pamphlet mentioned above, which remained in manuscript until quite recently, and was entitled :

*Des Circonstances actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution et des Principes qui doivent fonder la Republique en France.**

It is an important document which we cannot afford to neglect.

She begins by excusing herself, or seems to be excusing herself indirectly, for dealing with the matter at all.

It was in vain that she had laid down the law in the *Passions* that a woman should only enter public affairs under the direction of the man she loves.

It did not seem to her that any of the political writings of the day, including those of Constant (which certainly embodied her ideas, but in a style which she did not recognise as her own) could take the place of those which were formulating in her own mind.

* Discovered by M. Paul Gautier in 1899 (see his article in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1st Nov., 1899) the manuscript was thoroughly examined and discussed by M. Edouard Herriot in *Un Ouvrage Inédit de Madame de Staël : Les Fragments d'Ecrits Politiques* (1799), Paris, 1904 ; it was printed in its entirety in 1906 by M. John Viénot, (Paris. Fischbacher, 1906).

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

"Amongst a mass of political writings I found none which adequately set out my system."

And further on :

"A woman, because she is a woman, is exempt from giving umbrage or incurring suspicion of exploiting any personal ambition and is, therefore, favourably placed for telling the truth."

She excuses herself also on the ground of the imminence of danger, the unheard of prolongation of revolutionary anguish. She writes :

"Alas ! We are all sufferers ! Some of us have no peace of mind left, some are soured for life,

"Some sink under the weight of their destinies ; others brandish their lives like the torches of the Eumenides, in order to shake off sparks which will light their way, even if they dazzle at the same time.

"The future has no precursor.

"Man wanders in life like some being in an unnatural element.

"His habits, emotions and hopes are all reduced to confusion. Nothing but his pain makes him recognisable to himself and the continuity of suffering is the only link between one day and another."

And further on

"Is the whole course of our lives to be passed in misfortune ? Was our first youth the only happiness we shall ever know, and will our blood ever flow peacefully in our veins again.

"Will the Revolution come to an end during the lifetime of this generation ?"

Two years before, the prospect had been hopeful. People were beginning to live again.

Then the unhappy 18 *fructidor* threw everything back.

"Oh ! what a misfortune for France that rash men, incited by perfidious men, put an end, for an incalculable time, to the advantages which must always result from a representative system !

MADAME DE STAËL

"It was because 18 *fructidor* led to every kind of misfortune that there never ought to have been any provocation of men who were not worth the opportunity given them of upsetting the Republic, or even of upsetting the Revolutionaries, as some genuine mediators sardonically observed.

"Whatever we had done, say some men, the Directoire was resolved to have 18 *fructidor*. But there was no idea of it in the year before, and if the elections had not gone well for the Royalists, we should have secured wise successive reform in finance, justice and good administration this year, like last year."

If, before the month of *fructidor*, Madame de Staël's political opinions had been mistaken enough to allow her to believe for a moment that she could exploit a Royalist success for the furtherance of her own ideas, she had quickly been disabused.

She wrote this treatise to ensure an ending of this kind of political movement, one thing fired off after another, like bullets from the chambers of a revolver.

This irregular legislation only upset judgment and prolonged the conditions of despotic violence and anarchy indefinitely.

It was time to return to reliance on principle.

It was time to establish a government founded on principles which were geometrically true.

"I am searching," she wrote, "among the actual circumstances for something which will put an end to the Revolution; and I am seeking, by contemplation of the eternal virtues, for the foundation of the French Republic."

She did not stop at the enunciation of principles, being of opinion "*that, we have no right to advance a theory, without expounding how, in our opinion, it can be put into practice.*"

The examination having been made, it was then a question of commenting on the "actual political

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

circumstances," of the moment, that is to say, of the years 1797 and 1798, or to put it more exactly from September, 1797, to the end of 1798, a commentary which is supported by a curiously complete revelation of Madame de Staël's constructive thought on political matters.

The same forces are in action as in 1795, but the disposition of them is not the same.

The Jacobins are disputing every inch of the ground, but their cause is lost.

The only thing which maintains them in existence is, by a paradox, the rapid progress of the opposition.

The Jacobins served to counterbalance the Royalists.

The only circumstance which could have restored any power to the Jacobins was the abuse, by the Royalists, of their newly-acquired advantage.

Incidents like that of the 18 *fructidor* were doubly dangerous. They were calculated to give power to one extreme or the other.

That was the way to lose the Republic's cause.

Madame de Staël would not have mentioned the Jacobins at all, were it not for the purpose of giving them a farewell kick, if we may be allowed to express it thus, and of making one more definite pronouncement (since a stupid world persisted in confounding Jacobins with Republicans) "*that the name of Republican must not be applied to beings whose ignorance, bestiality and total incapacity left their vanity no outlet but crime.*"

But the danger-point was the Royalist party. It was impossible to deny the evidence of fact.

"Out of 120 newspapers sold in the streets of Paris, four were attached to the Directoire, four were moderate, and 112 were Royalist.

"From these last there poured a stream of invective,

MADAME DE STAËL

combining all the epigrammatic skill which the *ancien régime* could put into insult with all the scorn and atrocious vehemence of the new revolutionary jargon.

"And this invective was poured without stint or measure upon men of the most diverse nature and conduct: Benjamin Constant, Saint-Just, Roederer, Chaumette, Garat and Fouquier-Tinville were all subjected to it alike and I remember being called a 'fury,' or 'wild woman,' myself, by these despicable ranters."

At this time the elections regularly imported fresh contingents of Royalists into the two Councils.

Now, according to Madame de Staël, the Royalists were building on sand.

They had no majority in the country.

The country completely exhausted, and sick and tired of politics, would have preferred that the word politics should never be spoken again. The country was too weary to form any opinion.

The Royalist proclamations resounded in a vacuum, so that if that party was building on permanent victory, it was certain to be disappointed.

It was no good trying to persuade these people of that, however, for they were "fanatics in their own fashion; Royalists without the restrictions of Catholicism, or of the authority of the crown, or of the traditions of the aristocracy."

Such people are not to be persuaded of anything.

But the moderate Royalists, whose opinions were shared by Republicans, except for the question of establishing a Monarchy, ought to have perceived their error; they ought to have proclaimed that the Royalist party was wiped out.

"There is only one way for the Royalists to retain any power, and that is to purge themselves of any member who intends to use the party for any particular end."

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

This is a repetition of her recommendation in 1795, but it is more urgent.

This time it is the Republicans who are to be intransigent.

It is no longer enough to be simply a Republican ; you must be “ a Republican determined to break with the Royalist party.”

There remained the Directoire.

Madame de Staël opens a bold and stubborn attack upon that body with some cajolery.

She does not refuse the members the sacred name of Republicans ; she regards them as disinterested men who are pursuing an ideal, in spite of all their errors, and who, up to 1797, have provided “ a period of wise administration.”

The constitution of the long hoped-for Republic should be the crown of their efforts.

But stupidly attacked, before anything had been formulated, they had relapsed into the stupid method of government by force and had never returned to more enlightened paths.

The elections had become a mere farce, at which Republicans amused themselves like a lot of children playing the game of “ being grown up.”

The tribunals were carrying on the tragedy of deportation in an exaggerated form.

The press had been muzzled, and allowed nothing to transpire which did not pass the censor.

Conscription and useless wars in foreign lands were draining the country of its vitality and preventing any hope of return to prosperity.

All these things might be comprehensible if it were only a question of dealing with an army the day before, or the day after battle.

But it was a question of dealing with a whole nation, which was crying out for a constitution.

Madame de Staël asks :

“ Who can be called happy in this State ? No one in

MADAME DE STAËL

all France ! I do not believe that there is one man, either distinguished or obscure, who thinks it worth while to make any plans one year ahead !

“ Nor is there a man of any sort who is not trying to realize any independent fortune which he may possess ; who would not willingly sponge the tablet of his memory clean as though it were a slate ; and would not, at any moment, change his fate, name, and existence for that of some inhabitant of America, who is allowed to live in peace.”

Her conclusion is that “ it is extremely pressing that Republicans should change their methods.”

“ The Constitution must be modified in such a manner that all its resources, cleverly combined, go to the support of the Republicans, to maintain the Republic, and afterwards to capture public opinion by all the means which can establish the direction of it.”

And how was this to be done ?

The rest of the work gives an exact explanation of it.

The most urgent question was the suppression of abuses : “ So long as revolutionary measures prevail, the Revolution will continue.”

The Directoire ought not to defy the will of the nation any longer, by breaking every election in which the result is unsatisfactory to itself.

The tribunals should no longer be in the service of the government, but should freely administer equal justice to all.

The remains of the revolutionary tribunals should be done away with at once for ever.

And finally, “ Commerce must be protected, enlightened men must be chosen for public service, the national debt must be respected, and the exiles unjustly withheld from returning home must be recalled.”

But if the Directoire has abused its powers, that was

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

partly because it was placed in the position of being obliged to govern with a fragment of a constitution, supplying the gaps in an imperfect, or rather, unfinished organisation with measures suggested by the urgency of the moment.

Though inadequate their organisation was not in itself vicious.

This is so evident to Madame de Staël that she is willing to take this organisation as the framework of the plan of constitution which she sketches out in the second part.

In the future there should be some form of government standing for the Directoire of the past.

It should consist of a *Conseil des Anciens* and a *Conseil des Cinq Cent* as before.

The Upper Chamber (*Conseil des Anciens*) should be elected from the Five Hundred for life and an Executive Committee should be nominated from their number.

Not only were the members of the Upper Chamber to be permanent officials, but their moral independence was to be guaranteed by endowing each of them with a considerable revenue.

Thus, as we always find two elementary interests in all nations "the acquisitive instinct and the conservative instinct," the new French constitution would possess a conservative and a progressive body to balance each other.

If the Upper Chamber should come to disagreement with the Five Hundred they would have the use of a suspending veto, in virtue of which they could appeal to the country for a fresh election of the Five Hundred.

If the country should confirm the attitude of its most direct representatives, the Upper Chamber would be obliged to come to terms with the Five Hundred and through them with the nation.

Never a shirker, she had promised a workable and positive plan and we see that she has given it to us.

MADAME DE STAËL

It must be admitted that the plan is a summary one, and would appear even more so, if described in the words of Madame de Staël.

Neither is it strikingly original.

Little consideration is shown for the Directoire, or the Five Hundred, except in the question of the veto.

All Madame de Staël's enthusiasm is concentrated on the permanence of the permanent officials and their complete liberty of action.

We shall soon see why this is.

The permanent Upper Chamber is simply her old idea of government by the *élite* of brains and personality, cropping out again, now transformed into a Chamber of government and ruling over the destinies of France by the light of the purest and highest reason.

To be more precise still she suggests some names : Condorcet, Sieyès, Roederer, Godwin, in the generation before, "*and in her own generation a man whose reputation increases year by year, Benjamin Constant*. Others there are, whom party-spirit would reject, but whom Reason would welcome with extended hands. These are the right statesmen for the French Republic."

It would be difficult to be more explicit.

It is quite clear what she wants. But how will she get her idea of the ascendancy of a "natural aristocracy" accepted by the democrats, or by the Republic, at any rate?

And then, in extending the field of her demonstration, she will have to describe her *élite* more particularly, and to defend them since they are composed of much persecuted men. And, as a natural development of all this, she will have to touch on the ideas which these men represent, and define their moral starting-point, which will be the basis of all their actions.

Let us set aside the apology for the elect, for the moment, and stick to the strictly political theory.

Where, in all this well-organised constitution, is

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

there any relation to the principles of the French Revolution ?

It is a government certainly, but is it a Republic ?

Everything is flourishing at the top, but will the populace get its rights ? What has become of national representation ?

Let us start from the bottom, or rather since for France, the days of top and bottom are over, let us start from the dead level of equality, and see where it takes us.

Madame de Staël has foreseen this objection and anticipates it.

A really representative government does not represent individuals, but their interests which are both moral and material.

It follows that the man who aspires to representing and directing those interests, must be in a position to show that he has no other interests than those of his country, which, in a way, are only an extension of his own.

The candidate ought to be of independent means and, as far as possible, above the average in mind and morals.

Real political equality “ gives power in proportion to the faculties of the individual, and his influence over others, and in proportion to his ability for usefulness.”

“ Instead of putting ourselves back into the hands of a hereditary aristocracy, let us entrust ourselves to the undeniable aristocrats, the natural ones.”

A new element has been introduced into the theory of government by the *élite*.

It is no longer a question of mental properties only.

The fine simplicity of the idea has been compromised or it appears to be.

Why have men of independent means been placed in the phalanx of genius ?

The answer is two-fold.

MADAME DE STAËL

Without suspecting it, Madame de Staël, like everyone else, has fallen under the influence of reaction.

On this question of property, brought into great prominence by the propaganda of the demagogue Babeuf, who was executed in 1797, she delivers her opinions categorically :

“ Property,” she affirms, “ is the origin, the foundation, and the guarantee of the social pact.”

It is the only assurance of social stability and, having experienced five years of Revolution, Madame de Staël is the more convinced of it.

But there is something further :

“ In France at least, we may always hope that talent will be given the highest place ; but talent is the exception, and in regard to ability, men are now, or now think they are, more on one level than formerly *and therefore the mass of constant influence and consideration will rest on wealth.* We must not attempt to fly in the face of this natural order of things.”*

Talent by itself will always make up the ranks of the minority, worthy of honour, but not necessarily thereby, possessing any power.

By associating itself with the holders of property it will be able to secure a majority, a means of action and a guarantee of permanence:

And the people ? Authority represents or would like to represent their interests, but do the masses know what their interests are ?

The people are composed for the most part of “ a mass of calmly egoistic men who make fun of those enthusiasts who get themselves talked about, and who are able to live out their destinies, quite apart from public affairs, in private concerns and organisations connected with trade and property.”

“ Below these we find the vulgar herd which is susceptible to nothing but superstition and ranting.”

“ The opinion of this inert lump of humanity is acquired in advance by the man who holds the power.”

* See Note. Appendix C.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

How are we to hope or expect that this mass of stupidity will choose the best men to represent it ?

From 1789 the people have had the power to choose as their representatives, if they wished to, the very flower of intelligence in the land.

What happened ?

They preferred to be terrorised by " the most inhuman souls, the vilest characters, the most limited intelligences."

The populace left to itself, created a new aristocracy as a substitute for the old : " a peerage of criminals."

Then what was to be done ?

And since it was the philosophers and the elect of the eighteenth century who prepared the way for the Revolution would not Madame de Staël be leading up to a fresh catastrophe if she could get her own way ?

To that she replies that the Revolution took place because " the Republic ran away from its guides, so to speak."

Educated in the school of the old tyranny, the people were lacking in any idea of " public morality," and having attained sovereignty they assumed despotism.

They had now to be educated

" We must hurry on the work of time by all the best methods of public instruction and re-establish the ascendancy of mind and the institutions."

Here the circle of Madame de Stael's political thought closes up.

Her " elect " would naturally take upon themselves the task. Public education is, however, rather a slow method of amending public affairs and should follow, not precede, the formation of a national spirit.

" Men of letters are able to carry public spirit further and more swiftly along, than public education can do."

Thus she affirms, in conclusion, that there must be no more delay in putting the power into the hands of philosophers in order that they may use it to educate

the nation and the nation, once educated, would naturally maintain the flower of its intelligence in power.

The Government "must encourage thinkers of a certain order by every species of favour and distinction. These men, through the medium of a free Press, must enlighten the nation; and the nation, once enlightened, will naturally demand Republican institutions, public education, and will itself found these institutions under State protection."

For men and women of letters are neither more nor less "than the source of all the good that France may hope for."

Madame de Staël flattered herself that she was in contact with reality, and she was.

Whatever subject she deals with, her thought embodies two elements: one constant, unvarying; the other capable of adopting itself to the circumstances of the moment.

Her mind, so to speak, is able to change its garments without much affecting its dazzling identity.

Here, side by side with her well-known advocacy for government by first-class brains and personality (of which the tone is moderated in accordance with the circumstances of the day), we find a few observations applicable to the movement which might have considerable weight if we took them literally, and if we did not understand that they are not really attached to Madame de Staël's central and permanent idea.

This pamphlet deals with the actual circumstances of 1798, and Madame de Staël was obliged to pay attention to that, even if the said circumstances did not particularly interest her, in the abstract.

She has an opinion on all contemporary questions. For her it was not only a duty but a pleasure, a matter of taste and education. But we must not place too much reliance on her opinions of things which do not deeply interest her.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

For example, she is a true lover of liberty. She does not love it so desperately as she did when Napoleon had given her experience of the contrary, but still her love is calm and constant.

But when she is driven by the capricious changes of the rule of the Directoire to express opinions on the liberty of the Press, she deals with this important question in relation to the thoughts which chase each other through her versatile mind. First, thinking of calumnies printed against herself, she declares that the Press ought to be muzzled; and then, dreaming of a free Press as a superb medium for the communications of philosophers to the masses, she declares that it ought to be free.

What are we to conclude? Nothing.

All we need do is to make a note of the caprices of which her mind was capable, and then we may forget all about it, as Madame de Staël forgot all about it.

When reading the last section of the *Passions*, written probably during the first months of 1796, we saw how slight an opinion Madame de Staël entertained of religious creeds as a means of moral regeneration, for herself or anyone else.

And here she is two years later vehemently advocating the adoption of Protestantism as the State religion, and compulsory religion too, which Catholics would be brought to accept by being thoroughly enlightened on "the absurdity of their dogmas."

What follows is so incredible from such a woman that we are obliged to read and re-read the words in order to believe them.

There must be no persecution of Catholics, but the following would be good methods of dealing with them.

"The Catholic religion, which we desire to destroy, must be cut off from all distinctions of ambition and interest, and no priest shall be allowed to hold public office.

MADAME DE STAËL

"Anyone applying for any public office must be required to make a declaration altogether incompatible with the Catholic dogmas.

"In this way we shall weed out from this religion all honest men who will admit enlightenment, and all ambitious hypocrites who will be disgusted by the check on their temporal advancement.

"And, above all, I should insist on the propagation in France of another faith, by all the means of which a free state, backed by public opinion, can so easily dispose."

Only that! But is not that, massacres excepted, exactly the same treatment which had been meted out to Protestantism in France since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes?

It is a long way from the indifference of the *Passions* to the intolerance of this pamphlet; it forms a whole inner evolution, extraordinarily rapid and defying all psychological analysis.

No; not quite that. Madame de Staël is neither more nor less religious than in 1796. But events have marched on, and there is no need, as M. Viénot thinks, to reject opinions declared before this pamphlet was written, opinions elsewhere well supported.*

The religious question was certainly put; it was not put, however, by Madame de Staël, but by circumstances. Post-revolutionary circumstances brought it to the fore.

Faith was beginning to revive, little by little, after the long torment.

The pendulum swings back from ultra-independence

* *Des Religions*, by Viénot, page 82. M. Viénot's epitome of this pamphlet is admirably clear and exact. But as it was our business to trace the thread of Madame de Staël's dominating ideas rather than to analyse detail in the work, we have not used M. Viénot's commentary very much. The same might be said with regard to M. Herriot. Whoever looks for Republican ideas in Madame de Staël will assuredly find them. The point is to gauge the importance of them and to determine their place in the hierarchy of specific "Staëlian" philosophy.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

to a need of authority, from revolt to a craving for submission.

Side by side with the Royalist reaction, there sprang up a Catholic reaction, which was natural and sincere enough, though the Royalists tried to exploit it for their political ends.

The Republicans found themselves taken unawares. It was clear that this new force would have to be taken into account, and that there could be no question of divorcing the secular association of the Catholic faith from the equally mystic dogma of royalty in the minds of the people.

Being without a creed, and finding it necessary to acquire one, the heirs of the "encyclopedists" founded the sect of the Theophilanthropes, and obtained permission from the Directoire to celebrate their new creed in the churches of Paris.

It is here that Madame de Staël intervenes.

She begins by protesting that her religious opinions are sincere and that she is far from sharing the opinion of those who think that creeds are all very well for the masses, but superfluous for the intelligent.

Life is a positive affair, and completes itself naturally in positive belief.

Those who have been brought up in the Christian faith instinctively practice the virtues of mercy, self-sacrifice and delicacy, without being aware that they owe this to their religious education. We have all seen the complete calm of the dying. How do we explain it ?

"By a more or less confused idea, but always the same, a sensation which brings unexpected repose into your veins, which touches you and makes tears of relief fill your eyes ; the hope that there is a refuge beyond all this, beyond life, in some point, which none can define, of the sentient universe. Without this refuge, which man calls Heaven, what would become of human nature ? What would be-

MADAME DE STAËL

come of man under the yoke of man ? What would become of the merciful pitched into a mob of the cruel ?

"What idea can we have of the perfectibility of the human spirit unless we can form an idea of the Absolute in mental and moral value ?"

And this is perfectly sincere.

Religion, or, rather, religious ideas (she makes the distinction herself) have taken possession of Madame de Staël, thanks to the native piety of her mind, which is not naturally revolutionary ; and also thanks to the acute sensitiveness of her nature.

But all this is only leading up to the essential. The principle deduced is this :

"The more power you give to the wills of individuals the more need there is of some means of raising the moral life of the community."

That is why the question of religion comes up at all.

Madame de Staël does not leave the subject. She continues :

"Only morality, in conjunction with religious opinions, will give a complete code for all the actions of life, a code which unites men in a sort of pact of souls preliminary and indispensable to all social pacts."

Conclusion arrived at :

"Republics cannot succeed monarchies without a change of the nation's religion."

This brings us to the conclusion that Catholicism must be suppressed (without violence, of course) simultaneously with the institution of monarchy, and that another creed must be substituted for it.

Thus, simply because the question is to the fore, Madame de Staël feels impelled to give her opinion on it. It is not naturally the kind of question that she deals with ; it is not of the kind which strikes sparks of passion from her mind ; but, since the

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

question has been put, she will not shirk answering it, and so little inclined is she to shirk, even when not deeply interested, that she will endeavour to find the best solution for the problem.

Although she was undeniably a woman abreast with the thought of her day, and felt bound to stipulate that nationality should be the basis of the Republican religion, and bound to admit that Theophilanthropy fulfilled this condition, yet that creed could not satisfy her. If she had thought it advisable she could have furnished the reason for this repugnance. Without expressing it, without perhaps admitting it in thought, she was forced to feel the impertinent inefficiency of the new creed.

She felt that this invention, sorely in need of bolstering up itself, could be of little use to the Republic, and would ill-support an attack from the big guns of the ancient faith which it had undertaken to replace.

She proposes Protestantism as the national faith, because she says that it is a kind of Theophilanthropy "with deeper roots in the past," whose more enlightened ministers were engaged in pruning it of any remnants of dogma which were still attached to it.

"Many of these ministers are Socinians, that is to say, they do not differ from Theophilanthropists except in the more particular adoption of the incomparable morality of the Gospel."

Its own absurdity is sufficient proof of the slight importance which must be attached to this fantastic proposition of Madame de Staël. It would not be kind to take her seriously. Her scheme for a constitution shews that she perhaps had less ability for public affairs than she thought she had, but it is not ridiculous. The most that can be said against it is that it has not much significance.

But the religious proposition is a simple piece of giddiness on her part, an impertinent improvisation

of the spur of the moment which makes pretensions to being a solution of an eternal problem.

We can now understand that there have existed men of weighty understanding who have despatched this woman and all her works to the devil.

There are moments in her remarkable life when her personal force, combined with her curiosity and her desire to be useful, only force her into a ridiculous attitude.

It is then that she seems to give way wildly to the force of a hidden spring of impertinence, and that is all we need say in the matter.

But, having said so much, we must try to discover to what this impertinence is due.

Superabundance of vitality in the first place? Yes. Too blind a confidence in Reason with a capital R? Yes. But principally it is due to a momentary division between the two main elements of her being, emotion and mind.

This is what she is capable of when her mind is cut off from her soul.

In order to complete the exposition of her political theory, it only remained to recommend the *élite* to the nation in the chapter called *Des Écrivains : Men of Letters*.

This chapter is rather longer than it ought to be, because Madame de Staël, having been confined in the earlier part of the work to a field of action repugnant to her genius for improvisation, now compensates herself for all that has gone before, by a perfect frolic of joy in fields that she knows and loves.

Although logically this chapter has no place in a political treatise, it is by far the most important in the work, precisely because she is happily free of the limits which the subject really puts upon her,

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

and has returned to matters that she is exceedingly competent to deal with.

She states that the business of literary men is "to pour torrents of light" upon the nation.

But who are they and what ought they to write about?

This was a moment of fresh starts.

Were writers to remain exactly what they were before, or was Republican literature to be quite distinct from literature under a monarchy?

All men are now citizens, but the men of letters are the foremost citizens and have the keenest conception of their civic duties.

"A Republican will write, fight or govern according to the circumstances and the dangers in which his country finds herself."

"What was formerly meant by the term 'man of letters,' no longer exists in France; there is no longer any distinct clan or profession."

In principle, the body of Republican writers (which, by the way, is not to be a body) will consist of persons with gifts very similar to those of Madame de Staël.

"I cannot imagine a condition in which the talent for writing is separable from energy of heart and mind."

And yet writers must be classified in two bodies: First, philosophical writers; and, secondly, writers of imagination.

The latter will no longer continue to walk blindly in the way of Voltaire, who depended for his inspiration on the contrast between the institutions of his day and common sense.

Thus a writer of comedy should no longer confine himself to the scarification of the ridiculous, but should try to present a true picture of society. The aristocrat, by divine right, Tragedy, must also turn Republican, confining itself to the presentation of

MADAME DE STAËL

situations "in which any and every man can take part."

Sensibility for all must be the order of the day. The *New Héloïse* must stand higher than the *Héloïse* of antiquity. *Ossian* must be greater than the *Henriade*, and *Paul et Virginie* than *Telémaque*.

The art of depicting nature which enhances the pleasures of perception must be borrowed from England and Germany.

But Republican imaginations must be on their guard. There is one great danger: the danger of bad taste; that of democratizing the language which must remain aristocratic.

In order to avoid this danger, classical authors must be constantly studied: "Racine, Voltaire, and the works of the Greeks and the Latins, whose glory will never grow dim."

Natural language falls into a noble, harmonious style which produces in us the sort of enchantment which we derive from exquisite weather, crystal-clear air, and the dreaming silence of evening which draw our souls into harmony with the marvels of nature.

All this is not commonplace, perhaps, but the thought does not appear to be fully developed.

The explanation is rather brief.

Madame de Staël is not in touch with the centre of her thought.

She has something else to say which seems to her more important.

She has the first-named category of writers closer at heart.

The imaginative writers are yet to be born, the philosophical writers are all round her.

They are her friends.

"Thought is the pearl of greatest price in any man's being," she thinks.

Consequently, the thinker is the greatest of men. And, above all, in a Republic.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

Poets get carried away by their fantasies ; their history in this respect is most disquieting. They have always been encouraged by monarchs, as likely to be useful to their cause.

In the same way, men of science lose interest in public events, and soldiers are rarely good at steering a course among them.

But the world's history shews us that the despot fears the thinker.

Thinkers created the French Revolution.

" Thinkers are, at the same time, independent of circumstances and interested in them. They are, therefore, very formidable to any form of charlatan.

" They are the elect amongst the elect.

" Thinkers, therefore, are in the first rank of the community where equality reigns ! "

And what positive announcement are these formidable critics to make.

It is not so much what they are to say, as what they are to do.

They are to restore the reign of tolerance, mercy, generosity, and justice, for an intelligent human being is also a virtuous human being.

Philosophers are the best of men.

Their virtue will be communicated to the nation by means of their eloquence (" for eloquence is thought given life "), which will inject their ideas into the nation's life-stream, and " will convert the conviction of reason into an electrical impulse."

And the doctrine that they will preach up and down the country is to be the perfectibility of human nature by liberty and mental attainment.

They will do more.

They will prove that this doctrine is a sacred truth by means of historical facts, whatever may be said by men utterly disillusioned after living through the French Revolution.

She feels that it would be impossible to go further

back in history than the invention of the printing-press, because she demands proofs of her assertion.

But from that moment of increased light, humanity was able to rest assured "that there would be no more retrogression."

Here we get the two twin ideas side by side in the same book, the authority of the elect and the perfectibility of human nature.

Madame de Staël glides from one to the other without perceiving it.

For her the two are one, and she sees no occasion for specifying one as politics and the other as philosophy.

Why should thought and action be divided? They should march abreast: thought should end in action, and action should inspire thought.

In saying that men should bow to the leadership of conspicuous talent, is the same thing as saying that humanity is capable of being perfected, and that enlightened intellect is the instrument of progress.

And when you, yourself, are intelligent to a degree above the average, to believe in human progress is to wish to be in the advance-guard of that progress yourself.

So true it is that "the being who is conscious of genius and power finds it impossible not to desire to exercise it at least once in its mightiest force."

On political matters, Madame de Staël has said her last word; and we find that the last word is no other than that which she has constantly repeated.

In spite of all her efforts to pin her theory to earth, the political organization which she succeeded in proposing resembles nothing but the model which she had in her mind.

All that she demands of a political constitution is that it shall give her a place.

And she is a woman; a political scheme based on government by force, would leave her in idleness,

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

which was horrible to her. And, on the other hand, the more the government was based on pure thought the more obvious would be her place in the scheme of it, the more she would be able to place her intellect and her moral idealism at the service of humanity. That is why she has only one political idea, which never changes, but sometimes disguises itself in order to be acceptable to the men and circumstances of the moment.

This idea only gave expression in a particular form to the instincts and qualities of her nature.

She can go no further than herself.

Her political thought comes automatically to a standstill as soon as her personality has fully declared itself.

Then the only thing to be done is to put the same idea in a different way, in a dozen different ways. That is what she is actually doing.

There is great mention of writers and perfectibility in this political pamphlet because they are really united as the subject of a great work which she had had in hand for some time.*

* We know by reference to Chénedollé that Madame de Staël was working at a book on literature during the winter of 1798 (see Blennerhasset, Vol. II., page 388), and it is certain that she was busy with it much earlier than that.

The manuscript of *Des Circonstances* was finished at the end of August, 1799. That means that *De la Littérature* was begun before *Des Circonstances* and finished later.

In other words, Madame de Staël interrupted her great work to snatch a practical lesson from the times, like her contemporary writers.

This seems certain to us, and confirmed by our analysis of the political work.

The permanent part of *Des Circonstances* is certainly derived from the work on literature, for we must believe that, but for 18 fructidor, the pamphlet would never have been written.

When M. Herriot wishes us to believe that this accidental manifestation of Madame de Staël's mind is the second part of her book on the *Passions* (see Section V. of his work), an opinion which is shared by M. Viénot, we must indicate to M. Herriot that he is absolutely ignoring the connection which exists between the pamphlet *Des Circonstances* and the great work *De la Littérature*.

We should rather say that *De la Littérature*, the parent work, is the second part he refers to. It is surely a misconception to affirm that

MADAME DE STAËL

The political pamphlet has acquired an imposing amplitude from the fact of being side by side with so noble a neighbour. We must recognise this significance of the political work without exaggerating it. It is really a fragment which has strayed away from her *De la Littérature*.

Madame de Staël was only developing in *De la Littérature* ideas which she had expressed in the preceding year in the political pamphlet, and to add that she "left the wide field of politics to restrict herself to the study of literature!!" If he had put that affirmation exactly the other way round we could have admitted it as a true one.

CHAPTER XIII

WINDING UP THE CRISIS. SECOND PHASE. HER
WORK ON LITERATURE
1799-1800

THE Directoire was moribund ; the nation was sunk in inertia.

Royalists and Jacobins continued to abuse each other with no result.

Nothing was substantiated of the dream-Republic but the army.

To tell the truth, the Directoire was more than moribund ; it was dead.

The new Directors who had been elected in 1799 were nobodies, who would gravely discuss their own health with you, whilst all around them, in the midst of festivities after the antique, grave Republicans were making up their minds which of the generals would be chosen to declare the farce played out ; was it to be Joubert, Moreau, Bernadotte, or Bonaparte.

The enfeebled nation bestowed dazzled admiration on the army, and loudly demanded a military dictatorship.

Lucien Bonaparte sent accurate reports of everything that was going on to his brother in Egypt ; for Lucien was an important member of the Five Hundred.

Madame de Staël was also kept informed.

She was at Coppet, but Constant wrote the news to her, and she made a descent on Paris in April, with a view to obtaining more detailed information, but she was again expelled in July.

10. She finished her political pamphlet, *Des Circon-*

MADAME DE STAËL

stances, in the following month. But, instead of sending it to press, she reconsidered the matter and postponed publication.

It is certain that she no longer feared the Directoire. But she may have been afraid of prolonging its existence.

As long as the Directoire was in existence, Benjamin Constant could only deliver his orations at the Constitutional Club.*

She had written in *Des Circonstances* :

“Philosophy having been the principle underlying the French Revolution, it is by mental power, and not by the physical force of armies, that a successful outcome will be achieved.”

And again :

“The generals, considered solely from the point of view of military attainment, will have much less influence upon the mental life of France than the thinkers writing and speaking in their books and in the tribunes.”

“Every encouragement must be given in France to the ascendancy of sheer intellect, to fortify the principles which founded the French Revolution, and to protect the nation from militarism, which, from having been a means, may become an end in itself, far from advantageous to man and deleterious to manners, customs and laws.”

But she also wrote that : “Bonaparte had revealed his real bent by his anxiety to be received into the Institute.”

Bonaparte was not one of the generals who could only be considered as a fighting man, for he was “at once the most intrepid warrior and the most far-reaching thinker whom history had yet produced.” She is thinking of him when she stipulates that there shall be absolutely no age-limit (either up or down) for the deputies of her new Constitution, not even for the permanent body.

* See Note. Appendix C.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

“The welcomers of new ideas and soldiers famous for their exploits are generally young, and we must not on that account deprive ourselves of their support in civil administration. How much we should regret having fixed an age-limit for immortal deeds when Bonaparte appeared!”

We cannot mistake the tone here.

The Egyptian campaign had inflamed Madame de Staël's imagination and sense of romance, and she forthwith enrolled him in the number of her “elect.”

Consider this elegiac phrase in her *Considérations* :

“He always headed his proclamations as follows : *Bonaparte, Commander-in-Chief and member of the National Institute* ; one would conclude from that that he must be an ally of intellect and a protector of the art of literature.”

How should she not conclude it when he had ordered a copy of the *Passions* to be sent all the way to Egypt to him ?*

In the month of November, Madame de Staël heard that Bonaparte had just arrived in Paris.

She went off there with all speed.

On the 18 *brumaire*, while the future Consul and Emperor was deliberating at the Tuileries, she came across some postillions and ostlers at the gate of Paris whom she questioned eagerly.

They told her that the Director Barras had just passed under a military escort. He was going back to his country place at Grosbois.

On every mouth she heard the hero's name. The name of one man again, instead of the name of an assembly.

The next day the *Cinq Cents* and the *Anciens* met at Saint-Cloud. It was the decisive moment.

Madame de Staël did not leave Paris, but from hour to hour, Constant (who was posted as observer at Saint-Cloud) sent her word how things were going.

* See Gautier : Madame de Staël et Napoléon : page 13.

There is no reason to doubt what they were both wishing for.

"Once he sent me word that the Jacobins were carrying the day, and I prepared to leave France once more."

But the very next messenger sent her into the highest transport of joy. Bonaparte had triumphed. All roads were, therefore, thrown open to real ability. It was the victory of the decent-minded.

"There is no doubt that all high-minded people feared a victory for the Jacobins, and wished Bonaparte to triumph."

That was the truth.

Her addition of—"My own feelings, I must admit, were very mixed," is retrospective wisdom.*

The spectacle of the deputies clambering out of the palace windows to escape the police, still clad in the senatorial togas, delighted Constant so much that he made a point of describing it to his friend, Madame de Staël, who cherished the memory of it long afterwards.

A commission of fifty members of the two dismembered chambers (amongst whom were some of those who ran away at Saint Cloud) discussed the scheme for the new constitution under the Master's eye.

Every evening the friends of liberty met each other at Madame de Staël's and would comment on these sittings and discuss the points over which they had taken alarm.

They expected Bonaparte to request the oracle Sieyès to expound his scheme of constitution which had long been in the clouds.

Nothing of the kind happened.

Bonaparte only availed himself of a right which he judged opportune: the right of dispensing with a formal appeal to the people.

Madame de Staël did not intervene until later,

* See Note. Appendix C.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

when she presented Constant to the Master, who, upon representations from his brother Joseph, inspired by Madame de Staël, accorded the distinguished pamphleteer a place on the *Tribunat*.

In private life Bonaparte was ready to discuss any and every subject, but in public he never saw the necessity of thumping out a loud prelude to actions which he considered indispensable.

From the very beginning of his career he threw overboard Madame de Staël's cherished scheme of government by means of eloquence and reason. The *Tribunat*, who were more or less won over to Bonaparte's way of thinking, still had not quite grasped the passivity of the rôle he assigned to them.

According to the Consul himself, "there were a good dozen or dozen and half metaphysicians among them who were only fit to be drowned."

Naturally, these were Madame de Staël's chief friends, her intimates, the men she regarded as the nucleus of the future "elect."

But Bonaparte naturally only regarded them as the nucleus of a possibly dangerous opposition, and he told Madame de Staël, through the medium of his brother Joseph, that he would prefer to see her more openly attached to his government, and also that he was quite disposed to order that M. Necker should be repaid the sum which he had lent to the nation in earlier days.

That was a blunder.

She put on all the armour of the great lady and replied that it was a question of her convictions not of her desires.

But it *was* a question of what she wanted. She wanted to attach Bonaparte to herself in some fashion or other, nothing less than that.

That is why she attacked him, seeing no other way of getting at him at all.

After consultation with his Egeria, Constant

MADAME DE STAËL

sounded the charge by a sarcastic speech in the *Tribunal*, which aimed at condemning the precipitation with which the new legislation was being rushed through.

Three days later the young orator's brilliant start was to have been celebrated at a large reception at Madame de Staël's.

The only arrivals were notes of excuse.

On the 10th the disappointed hostess was quite out of countenance.

The newspapers made her see how matters stood. Bonaparte would not yield.

On the contrary, his retort was merciless, letting loose on the mischief-makers all the fury of both Royalists and Jacobins which was always ready to fall upon Madame de Staël. Bonaparte wound up both parties impartially. They were done with.

The journal called *Le Peuple* recommended Madame de Staël to start for Switzerland, and advised Constant to apply for election to the Swiss Senate. While the Royalist organ, *L'Ange Gabriel*, revelled in exposing the artless intentions which lay at the back of her defiance of the Consul.

"Benjamin shall be Consul; I shall give the Finance to Papa; my uncle shall have the Lord Chief-Justiceship, and I will be General Inspector of Everything and Everybody, and I shall certainly lord it over the Institute."

This was not all. Fouché, the Minister of Police, requested her attendance at his office.

But, after the wounding insults of the Press, this interview was quite consolatory.

Fouché did, indeed, let her know that Bonaparte was perfectly aware who had inspired the defiance of Constant, but, he added soothingly, that all was not lost; it was only a question of another little penitent sojourn in the country, and then everything would come right again.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

She went away to Saint-Ouen and busied herself with giving the finishing touches to the manuscript of *De la Littérature*, which she counted on, to rehabilitate her in the eyes of the public and of Bonaparte, whom she did not despair of softening. She did not despair of compelling him to be edified by her labours and personality.

Thus passed the spring of 1800, given up to a mixture of disquietude and hope.

De la Littérature appeared in April.*

DE LA LITTÉRATURE

In order to arrive at a complete and truthful conception of Madame de Staël from reading her *Passions*, it will not suffice to reduce the fluidity and variation of her life to their several elements.

All the elements are to be found there.

But the proportions are slightly altered by the weight of circumstance; the pose of the experienced woman is a little too well carried out and maintained not to do injury to the real woman's nobility of soul. Before the tribunal of her own mind she always added her optimism to the other qualities.

But, after having analysed her attacks of nerves and depression, in order to get rid of them, she was counting on summing up in a complementary work the opposite condition of mind which always existed in her as well as the emotional one, and which, in a way, maintained the equilibrium of her being from day to day.

However, the public had been obliged to wait so long for the promised second part of the *Passions* that, when it did appear, it was not recognised. It

* In *Dix Années de l' Exile*, Chap. III., page 213, Madame de Staël says "towards spring-time in 1800." A letter of Madame de Staël to Fauriel, quoted by Sainte-Beuve (*Portrait Contemporains*, Vol. II., p. 486) proves that the book was printed at latest in April. But there is nothing to prove that it did not appear in March. Moreover, Madame de Staël returned to Paris at the beginning of February, before the publication of *De la Littérature*. *Dix Années d'Exile*, ed. Gautier, page 13, Note 1.

is even to be doubted whether the author realized exactly what she was producing when she wrote *De la Littérature*.

Circumstances had changed the form which she intended for the second part of the *Passions*. In that work, as an exception contrary to her habit, she had forsaken thought for action, which was a practical method of giving the lie to anything which seems like exaggeration in the subject matter of the *Passions*.

But she really had not any formulated plan for the second part.

She longed, as she had longed in 1796, for one thing only; and that was to succeed in giving the fullest expression to herself.

But that was not a plan, it was an instinct, about which she could not easily take the public into her confidence.

It is still the same old question of happiness.

But in *De la Littérature* it is not a question of the negative happiness to be found in resignation and sacrifice, but of the positive happiness which comes through hopefulness and intelligent action.

When we have fitted the two pieces of the puzzle together we shall know the whole of Madame de Staël's complex being.

The basic subject matter, which she formerly laid down for the second part, has not been changed.

But its form has been determined by circumstances, or, to put it more precisely, by political circumstances.

The battle-field and the weapons had gradually been altered.

During the lull of the Directoire the combatants had time to recognise each other.

Those who had suffered most from the Revolution, tracing influences back from persons to ideas, hotly derided the attitude of mind which had led to the

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

violent dissolution of established law and order, the attitude which had characterised the whole of the Eighteenth Century in France, and especially the latter half of it.

There was no doubt what the new distribution of forces would be like.

The philosophers were in the minority, a mere handful of survivors from the preceding century, obstinate idealists who still counted on their ability to weld the future with the past, by simply amputating the whole revolutionary period from the body of history.*

In the opposite camp were now to be found not only the nation and the Royalists, re-converted to Catholicism, but also a new species of philosopher and thinker who employed the methods of reason to prove that reason has no supreme authority.†

Thus the *Considérations sur la Révolution Française* by Joseph de Maistre (whom Madame de Staël had met in Switzerland) and the *Théorie du Pouvoir Politique et Religieuse* by Bonald appeared together in 1796, just at the time when the young Chateaubriand was scribbling the manuscript of his *Essai sur les Révolutions*, in London, which gave the world to understand, when the first volume appeared in the following year, that Republicans no longer had the monopoly of thought.

Politics were again being dealt with in philosophical forms.

The old guard of the philosophers, driven to the defensive, dropped their schemes for a Republican constitution and entrenched themselves in their last ditch.

The various works published on the subject crossed each other's paths.

In 1793, *Political Justice*, by Godwin, the Rousseauist, arrived from England.

In 1795, Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau His-*

* See Note. Appendix C.

† See Note. Appendix C.

MADAME DE STAËL

torique des Progrès de l' Esprit Humain, was scattered broadcast over France.

There was clearly suggestion in the atmosphere, and by that we mean the political atmosphere of the Directoire interlude, nor do we mean anything stronger than suggestion.

Although it is called philosophy, the discussion has not ceased to be bound to its political origin.

The tone and method of politics had been changed, but they still dominated all minds, all considerations.

That is how Madame de Staël viewed her problem.

That is why she took this mission in high politics upon herself. She was looking forward to the actions which must arise out of these circumstances.

But that is not all.

By a happy coincidence the abstract synthesis corresponds in every point with her personal emotion.

Her first gesture as a writer had been that of an insurgent against the retrogression of Rousseau's thought ; and this gesture simply gave authorisation to her own instincts.

Ever since, in all her works, the *Passions* included, she had never ceased to affirm her belief in human perfectibility, not as a system of philosophy certainly, but as daily and necessary inspiration in life.

Her need of political action was descended directly from this.

We may believe that Madame de Staël showed little hesitation in embarking on her task.

The atmosphere sharpened her zest in it and actually seemed to invite her to follow up her first part with a second.

Also she had no need of Condorcet to point out the way.

How and why did she feel the perfectibility of herself ?

Because of her intelligence and because her intelligence loathed inertia.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

How did she develop her intelligence ?

Through literature.

Whether she read or wrote she was always aware of making progress.

In the first place the progress was a reality.

And secondly the agent of progress was literature.

Had she not stated this in the *Essay on Fiction* ?

She affirmed it again in the most unmistakable manner in the *Passions*.

She reiterated it towards the end of her life in the Second Preface to *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Thus :

“ In the development and perfecting of one’s mind there is never-ceasing activity and hope which is unendingly born again. The course of every day life offers nothing in the least resembling it. The downward slope begins too soon for women except as regards the mind ; for it is in the mind’s immortal nature always to be on the up-grade.”

For Madame de Staël then progress and literature are one and the same thing, and indissoluble.

You could not write on the one without thinking of the other.

The aim of the book is to promote political action.

The case for useful action is the perfectibility of human nature.

In order to bring out this perfectibility which produces, and is produced by progress, the best subject to treat of, is literature, which may alternatively be called reason or philosophy, or more comprehensively we may call them all the Light-Bringers.

Any evidence that may be needed must be drawn from history, and since it is a question of the perfectibility of humanity, from the history of humanity.

It is thus and thus that in the soul of Madame de Staël, the year of grace 1800, confronts the eternal verities.

In this work on Literature of 675 pages, “ we are

going to make a survey of the history of the human mind from the time of Homer up to the year, 1789."

Bonaparte is not named in *De la Littérature*, but there is far more concern with him in this work than there is in *Des Circonstances*, where his name actually appears three times.

In *De la Littérature* we find a perfect hail-storm of veiled allusions to him; cajolery alternating with threats, beneath which it is not difficult to discern an offer of collaboration coming from a woman.

Now, she says that any nation must crumble to dust when it is composed entirely of admirers of one person; now, that it is not true that a single star shines more brightly than a star surrounded by a galaxy of bright stars.

She recommends that "the careers of arms, legislation and philosophy should be welded into one."

Force cannot stand alone.

"If the force of arms reigned alone in a state, disdaining letters and philosophy, the Light Bringers would be as much degraded as if they were mere upstarts in the national scheme of things; we may be certain that they would soon be represented by a few persons of mean attainment commissioned to advertise the advantages of force, men who would call themselves thinkers, in order that they might prostitute the privileges of mind."

Philosophers, thinks Madame de Staël, should inspire not only "respect," but "fear," for "generous eloquence" makes all unjust authority tremble; just as "philosophy puts a check on the unreasonable growth of a military spirit," and renders it unworthy of the human race "to govern the human race arbitrarily, despotically and scornfully."

And here, still vibrating, is the echo of that last rash effort in the *Tribunat*:

"If words are not eloquent instruction to the

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

motives of action, if actions are not consecrated to the sacred truth of words, memory will only keep an isolated record of words and actions.

“The warrior without intellectual enlightenment, or the orator who is a coward, cannot take possession of one’s imagination. There remain emotions in one’s being, over which he has no power; and ideas which retain full power to sit in judgment over him.

“One faculty which is out of proportion with all the others seems a peculiarity in nature, while the friendly re-union of all faculties tranquillizes the mind and attracts affection.

“The moral being of a great man should present just such an organisation of his faculties, just in this manner, should they balance one another and compensate for one another, for in characters, as in government, this sense of balance will alone give a feeling of repose and stability.”

If we abstract Bonaparte from the scheme of things these words must mean that the only condition conducive of perfection by means of the Light-Bringers is absolute liberty.

Without this liberty there will be no government by the “elect,” and without the “elect” there will be no enlightenment.

So we find Madame de Staël attacking history, armed with two immovable convictions with which she is prepared to fight her way to her end: the first is that human nature *can* be perfected; the second, that human nature has never been so near perfection as at those periods when it has enjoyed political liberty.

We shall see that it will fare ill with facts that are not in accordance with this double theory.

We are soon told that Roman literature takes a higher place than Greek, first “because of the national spirit and patriotic devotion of the Latin people,” and, secondly, because Roman literature is the more modern in time.

MADAME DE STAËL

“The Roman character at its most admirable was only displayed during the Republic.

“If modern Italian literature is not worth much, it is because the country has been deprived of all national ideals and political liberty.

“But if political liberty were declared in Italy, it is beyond all doubt that the men who already give evidence of possessing distinguished talents would carry them very much further.”

We find the same note in connection with Spain :—

“It is in Spanish nature to unite the imagination of the North with the imagination of the South, all the grandeur of Chivalry with all the grandeur of the Orient . . . but . . . monarchy . . . has stifled the germs of every species of glory.”

Inversely she demonstrates that the great literature of the North has blossomed to its full florescence under the ægis of liberty.

Armed with two theories, instead of one, Madame de Staël, instead of being embarrassed thereby, finds herself all the better equipped for manœuvring ; and she does manœuvre with a skill which must have commanded the admiration of the great tactician whom she was criticising.

If it is sometimes difficult to find evidence of the great truth “which surges up from the abyss of facts and centuries,” she makes us understand, that it is because, for the time being, liberty was lacking, that intellectual forces did not bring progress.

Granted liberty, human progress was simply a matter of arithmetical progression.

Menander and Theophrastus “have the advantage of a century” over Aristophanes.

Modern philosophy has that superiority over Roman philosophy which one would expect from the mind of man, who has had two thousand years additional time for reflection.

“Aristotle lived in the third Greek century and,

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

consequently, in a century superior to the two preceding ones in thought."

Inevitably also, "The century of Louis XIV., the most remarkable of all in literature, is very inferior to the following one in philosophy."

We can see clearly that Madame de Staël's political mind is unchanged since 1799, except that she is now on the defensive.

Whosoever shall say Liberty, does thereby imply Republic.

And if this work, *De la Littérature*, proves that France is perfectible, in spite of the French Revolution, then one would naturally wish to put the matter of perfecting France into the hands of those who believe in its perfectibility, the only hands which can bring the matter to a good end.

Liberty alone will not suffice.

Give liberty without the Light-Bringers and the only result will be, that everything will descend to the level of the meanest attainments in the land.

Whosoever shall call for a Republic, calls for an honoured and responsible body of the elect, as the final tribunal in the affairs of the nation.

This is the embodiment of the dream of the author of *Corinne*; with the help of liberty and literature, she will create round herself an ever-widening, ever more intelligent public, and she will be enthroned in this France risen new-born from ashes, surrounded by the members of her *élite*, just as though she were queening it in some vast *salon*.

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

We shall be surprised at the sudden appearance in this book, where literature seems quietly subordinated to a political idea, of a theory which is really literary, or rather it is an enormous and powerful synthesis by

MADAME DE STAËL

which the literature of Europe is classed according to geographical position in one or other of two main divisions : the North and the South.

Evidently there is no lack of ideas in this work.

This, at any rate, is an arresting one.

Whence comes this idea ? We do not find it in the *Essai sur les Fictions*.

There is nothing in Madame de Staël's literary past which indicates special interest in literary systems. Where did she get the idea ? Or, how did she come to invent it ?

We must notice which are the outstanding features of the system.

What separates modern times from antiquity ?

Not Time but Christianity.

The coming of this new religion, so utterly different to anything which went before, was the capital fact in the history of European nations ; it was the peg from which all their evolution was unwound, and all the evolution of modern morality.

Now we find that this difference between two epochs is reproduced and perpetuated to a lesser, but quite recognisable degree, between the nations which derive directly from Christianity, those of the North, and those of Latin origin which keep much of their Pagan culture under super-imposed Christianity.

This great historical division made by Christianity, is then confirmed and carried on by geographical considerations.

Germanic or Northern literature has very different qualities from Latin or Southern literature.

The master-mind of the literature of antiquity was Homer : Ossian commands the legions of the North.

Madame de Staël honestly admits her preference for the latter.

Chateaubriand was much shocked by Madame de Staël's idea of linking perfectibility with Christianity.

But she had no difficulty in reconciling the two.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

She did not see it as a question of dogma, but considered the moral results of Christianity as historical phenomena.

Christianity had created a faculty in modern man which hardly existed in the Pagan soul, that of introspection, otherwise called Conscience.

Far from being an obstacle to the development of the philosophical spirit, it added much to that spirit, developed and defined it; for what are introspection and reflection, but two aspects of the same phenomenon?

Christianity has given added sensibility to thought. Moderns use their souls when they think.

After that we are not surprised when we are told that Northern nations are more Christian than those of the South, because they profess Protestantism.

And, moreover, the potency of Christianity to bestow new gifts on life, comes from the fact that it raised the status of women.

Modern society comes direct from the emancipation of women.

Women live in, on and by emotion. They excel in the art of fiction, which was unknown to the ancients, and is essentially modern.

We begin to understand her point of view.

Whoever speaks of introspection implies melancholy.

Introspection, melancholy, sensibility and the spirit of reflection are all different aspects of the same thing and may be called quite impartially either Christianity or philosophy.

It is Christian and modern to find a cause of torment in one's own soul and to dig into the cause of one's sorrow.

Thought contributes an important quota to this state of mind.

Without thought there could be no self-examination.

This modern art has two faces, one grave and philosophical, the other distraught with passion, or bowed down with heavy anguish.

MADAME DE STAËL

Which are the really elect souls on the face of the earth ?

Those which are "exalted and melancholy."

Those which tire quickly of "the finite and the fleeting," those which have experienced "all generous passions."

These are the souls which feel "that the great deeds of man owe their existence to his painful sense of the incompleteness of his destiny."

The brilliant sunlight, crystal streams and vivid grass of the South suggests nothing to such souls as these.

They turn naturally to nature, which is in unison with their souls, to a landscape which suggests the tragedy of their own lives, to the "dark and rugged North."

The "Northern imagination" is the imagination which inspires itself in the grandeur of the sea-shore, in the roar of winds and in the desolate bleakness of a lonely heath ; it is, in fact, the imagination which carries the wearied soul onward towards the future, towards another world, where its quality will be recognised.

The Northern imagination flies beyond this world, away through the mists which lie on the northerly horizons and represent to those souls their difficult passage from life to eternity.

Thus climate confirms the work of Christianity.

The joyous sunny South encourages gaiety, an unthinking and child-like Paganism ; the cold mists of the North drive man in upon himself in order that he may know himself and suffer.

Although we may not be able to see how Madame de Staël built up the frame-work of her system, we instantly recognise the elements of which it is composed from our knowledge of her.

This modern literature, that she speaks of, made up of sensitiveness and introspection, slightly supported

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

by Christianity, from which all dogma has been removed, with a dash of rationalistic philosophy and a dash of feminism, is just what we should have expected Madame de Staël to imagine or invent.

With her it is a question of creating a new literature. And she does not at all wish it to be compromised by association with political ideas which are already out of date.

But otherwise she is quite unfettered and is, perhaps, embarrassed by the absolute freedom before her to take any direction she pleases.

She, therefore, defines the new literature just as she would like it best, drawing some inspiration from all the pre-romantic stuff which she devoured in her stormy youth, which has continued to satisfy her sensibilities without filling the capacity of her mind.

She only makes one stipulation, and that is that Republican literature is to be philosophical as well as emotional and for the rest she relies on the mode.

The mode was for Ossianism.

Ossian, whose fame was obscured for a short time by the cloud of the Revolution, was the first Consul's favourite poet.

Quite independently of Madame de Staël's influence, this Celt was in a fair way to be recognised as the official bard of New France.

Writers of every branch of literature, except a small rear-guard of Voltaireans, had fallen under his influence; neither poet, novelist nor playwright had escaped it.

Madame de Staël accepts the fact quite simply.

Ossian had the advantage of being more a vague legend than anything else. Madame de Staël did not even try to pluck him out of the Northern mists which enveloped him and defied analysis.

The vaguer he was, the more suggestive he became, the less opposition he offered to any imagination which only wanted to use him as the starting-point

MADAME DE STAËL

for long wanderings in any regions to which it was drawn.

There is nothing to prevent anyone from taking Ossian as an essentially Christian poet.

Why not also make him something of a philosopher ?

As for the forms that he uses they are the loosest that could be conceived of, and, therefore, satisfy Madame de Staël's one condition for form ; that it shall not create an obstacle for full communion of souls.

The wild setting of his works, the winds, the mists, the moss-grown rocks, seem to Madame de Staël to realise just that harmony between nature and man which she, with a good number of her contemporaries, had approved, as a component element in emotional art.

The clash between modern and classical art is inherent in such a general thesis as hers, and if, knowing how thorny a way is to be trodden here, she took care not to affirm that literature is perfectible, she is not the less vehement in her defence of the rights and the superiority of modern literature.

This attitude is an instinctive one in her case.

It was the only one possible to her.

It is an integral part of a system which seemed inevitable to her and for the adoption of which she can hardly have consulted literary history.

It is more likely that she appropriated the idea of ranging the legions of antiquity under Homer and those of the moderns under Ossian, from the Scotsman, Blair.*

For the rest, once she had adopted the notion of this rivalry between epochs, it was natural that her mind should continue it in the idea of the moral intervention which must be the result of the establishment of Christianity.

The originality of Madame de Staël's system is not in any one of these ideas, but rather in the mixing, or

* See Van Tieghem, Vol. I., page 225.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

super-imposing one upon the other, of a number of ideas which had formerly been independent of one another.

We can see this in this last aspect of the question of North and South.

Since the Seventeenth Century the barbarism of the North had been the accepted foil, in the manuals of aesthetes and men of learning, for the elegant and classical culture of the Latin races, especially of France.

The Anglomania of the Eighteenth Century took the sting out of this notion, but did not destroy it entirely. Towards 1760, the North and the South were still held up as rivals to each other, but it was beginning to be admitted that the Northern races might possess a culture of their own which differed from that of the South, as their characters certainly differed.

Madame de Staël, anticipating a little, imagines for them the possession of that new art and literature, which the New France was in search of.

Taking a very small thread of history (the invasion of the barbarians) to help her, she binds the literary and historical rivalries together.

This connection is less suggested by facts than commanded by a keen desire for intellectual symmetry.

This same desire for symmetry makes it necessary that the whole scaffolding of this literary system shall contribute to the support of the central thesis.

Thus, the geographical theory with all its subordinate ideas, the religious theory and all the ideas derived from it are finally ranged in Madame de Staël's mind behind the thesis of the perfectibility of human nature, although previously all these theories were merged one into the other, forming a compound, which also established the perfectibility of humanity.

Looked at fairly, this is not merely the manœuvring of a mind bent on clarity and true proportions.

It is not through any caprice that unity runs throughout the whole.

This unity may not have existed in history, in the facts, and critics of *De la Littérature* would have a fine opportunity of demonstrating that Ossian, discovered at the end of the Eighteenth Century, could not preside over an evolution in literature, which had been accomplished without him.

But history, considered as a series of dates, or a sequence of events, is non-existent for Madame de Staël.

It is a repertory of facts from which certain ideas and certain logical conclusions related to the facts are disengaged.

But then, neither has logic the last word.

It is not logic to give readers to understand that Ossian had philosophical tendencies or sympathies ; neither is a strong desire that he were a modern to be called logical.

The unity to which everything in this work refers back, to which even the rights of intelligence give way, is that of the personality of Madame de Staël.

Let us reduce her system to its origin, which is a personality ! Make it a man or a woman.

How is this man or this woman composed ?

In the first place it is an original personality, and it is Nordic, at any rate, it is in some way related to the North ; its native heath, so to speak, is not in France ; it unites acute sensitiveness with very fine mental abilities, but they are united in such a fashion that the two elements become one element by inter-penetration, and we get an emotional intelligence or an intellectual soul ; they are one and the same phenomenon, and its range of comprehension is absolutely unrestricted ; this ambiguous instrument is equally comprehensive of art, religion, or the exercises of pure intellect.

And, little by little, we are simply compelled to adopt the opinion that the personality is that of a woman, for, side by side, with the other theses, or underneath them, there runs the current of a rather

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

special thesis, a feminist one, which strange to say, is able to be positive and negative in the same breath, and while insisting on the rights and merits of *Woman*, it warns *Women* that the career of literature is very ill-adapted to their sex.

Can we reconcile all this with logic ?

Or can we even see the necessity that all these notions should be forced into the same volume ?

It is not possible.

After having explained the system we must begin to make allowance for its incoherences.

There is only one name, one explanation, one unity, which covers it all.

Madame de Staël herself.

This subjectivity of hers is at once imperious and docile.

The atmosphere about it makes it pliant, and the element of strife in the subject stimulates it.

Madame de Staël is not the scared and solitary spider, producing its web entirely from its own substance, which is Taine's idea of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

It is true that she is only receptive of matter from outside, which is of the same genus as matter which is already within her.

But that she will receive without repugnance and without stint.

Once having granted this, there is no outside influence which we can afford to neglect, for we may be certain that there was no wave in the sea of contemporary life which buffeted her without some response on her part.

She had obviously read Charles de Villiers' article in the *Spectateur du Nord*, of October, 1799, which brought the merits of German literature before the French public.*

* *Spectateur du Nord*, 1799, Vol. III., pages 324-335. See also on Charles de Villiers, Isler M., *Briefe aus des Nachlass von Charles de*

MADAME DE STAËL

And, speaking generally, it was always thus, that she supported her literary theory, somewhat perilously between the most recent and fleeting actuality and the abiding permanence of her soul.

Only one of those points of support had any solidity.

This is why her scheme is at once bold and feeble, original and commonplace, significant and puerile.

DETAIL OF THE LITERARY THEORY: THE SOUTH

The first accident which is bound to happen to the reader of *De la Littérature* is that he loses his sense of Time.

For Madame de Staël, Time consists of two epochs: Antiquity and Modernity. And for her they have nothing to do with chronology; their significance is entirely a moral one.

Thus, she feels that if the English poet Thomson, is a modern, Shakespeare is no less so, and Petrarch, in spite of having been born in a modern country, is not modern.

From the way Madame de Staël speaks of them, one would almost believe that Waller, Cowley, Doune, Chaucer, Pope, Spenser, Butler and Gay were all contemporaries of one another.

It is a simple idea which links them; in her eyes they all have the same fault.

Little by little, under her guidance, we forget Antiquity altogether; it fades away.

The history of literature is now represented by a flat canvas, which has surface, but no depth, and on this she ranges the opposing forces as if it were a chess-board.

Villiers, Hamburg, 1879. Also Witmer L., *Charles de Villiers, un Intermédiaire entre la France et l'Allemagne et un précurseur de Madame de Staël*, 1908.

The Spectateur du Nord, in 1800, says: "We can trace the substance of M. Charles de Villier's article to this journal in all that Madame de Staël says on German literature." For Madame de Staël's knowledge of German literature before 1800, see Sorel. *Madame de Staël et la Cour littéraire de Weimar*, page 13; and d'Haussonville, *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1 Dec., 1913, p. 552.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

There are only two camps, the North and the South ; and Antiquity is thrown in with the latter.

This injustice is involuntary, but symptomatic, and makes it easy to predict the issue of this unequal struggle.

Taking infinite pains (a great indication of the enthusiasm with which she attacked her task), this modern woman devotes no less than seven chapters, in which, after a great demonstration of impartiality and indulgence, she submits Antiquity of the dictionaries to mitigated condemnation.

For her Antiquity is only the childhood of Man.

In poetry the Greeks had the luck to be the first-comers. They were the first to imitate nature and to give animated descriptions of exterior objects.

But in all that we find neither reflection, sensibility, knowledge of the depths of passions, no hint of melancholy, according to Madame de Staël.

Her observations on Greek literature are drawn out to some length, however, and for once in a way she follows a rigorous chronological order in her commentary, for she is bent on maintaining that there were stages in this dawn of thought ; and the existence of Homer does not prevent her from making this affirmation most tranquilly.

Roman literature, later in time than Greek, and blossoming most fully in the days of the Republic (also much esteemed in France, under the Directoire) is more tenderly handled by Madame de Staël.

But that is a mere question of fine shades.

The central thesis remains intact : the literature of Antiquity is the work of children, charming and amiable children it is true, but as such, it cannot escape having the defects of its qualities.*

* According to Madame de Staël, mythology is puerile. She does not seem able to make any distinction between the nurse's tales, which seemed ridiculous to her childish precocity, and the real poetry of mythology. It is a pity that, after having abused mythology in her *Essai sur les Fictions*, she does not tell us her whole opinion of it in *De la Littérature*.

MADAME DE STAËL

She slips a few rapid and acute observations on Italian and Spanish literature between her chapters on modern literature.

She couples them together for the excellent reason that, as yet, she knows very little of the first, and nothing at all of the second. It is only a very slender chapter, padded out with declamation.

Spaniards have suffered much political misfortune, one cannot expect much of them.

Their characters contain "courageous dignity and acute sensibility."

Calderon and Lopez give evidence of high feeling.

Above all, Spaniards know how to love neither tamely nor with superfluous subtlety, which Madame de Staël considers the right way to love.

But for the Italians she can find no excuse.

If she had, we should have been able to decide what we really think about Madame de Staël, especially about Madame de Staël as an artist.

Because she is so ill-disposed to mythology some serious critics have decided that she was incapable of feeling or understanding poetry.

The conclusion is justified, at any rate for the first period of her development when her mind was still stiff and arrogant.

And there is no doubt that Madame de Staël never fully appreciated the use of the image.

Thanks to Chateaubriand she came to tolerate it, and vaguely to feel its beauty, but she never used it herself and for a good reason. Nevertheless, if the conclusion that she had no response to poetry is based on the fact of her aversion to mythology, we must point out that Chateaubriand also passed a theoretic sentence of condemnation on mythology, and he was never accused of being unresponsive to poetry.

We may suspect that, in Madame de Staël's case, the opinion was already formed, and that there was no need to discover that she despised mythology in order to find out that she was no poet. The fact is, that in the year 1800, or thereabouts, mythology was in a very delicate position. Chénier's poems were not yet discovered, but both Bertin and Parny had "arrived."

Madame de Staël was quite justified when she formed the opinion (before Chateaubriand) that the use of Pagan mythology is suspect as a subject for poetry in Christian countries.

But it is not so much the shock to commonsense which brings Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand for once into agreement, as their mutually-felt aversion to libertine poetry.

If mythology was looked at askance by serious critics at the beginning of that century it is because it had been debased for the amusement of the *Salons*.

We should do well not to forget this.

Above all, when weighing the opinions of Madame de Staël, we must never neglect to consider them in the light of contemporary events,

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

These descendants of the Romans carry their decadence to the point of laughing at their own abasement.

“When we find the successors of the Romans, although barren of national peace and political liberty, yet able to comport themselves as some of the happiest people on earth, we *must* have a low opinion of their natural faculties.”

That is what you get from Madame de Staël, when you have allowed yourself to be beaten by Bonaparte!

She gives a very bad impression of the Italian character: She says: “They are vindictive, but nevertheless servile. They are the slaves of women, but nevertheless know nothing of deep and lasting sex-emotions. They are miserably superstitious in the practice of Catholicism, but they do not believe in the least in the indissoluble alliance between religion and morality.”

She explains it thus:

“This alteration in the Roman character is due to religious tyranny and bad government and also to the burning sun. The same sun burned down upon the ancient Romans, but his might is no longer combated “with the energy of political passions.”

Italian literature has a quality of “poetic invention” which is due to the influence of the Arabs. But this quality is badly compromised by a tendency “to affectation and preciousness.”

Those who afford examples of this vice are Ariosto, Petrarch, Boccaccio (who is also immoral) and various others.

She hardly touches on Dante.

She discerns much sensibility in Tasso; for she feels his influence in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, which seems to modernise him for her and make him sympathetic.

But all this literature is in the same case as Greek literature.

It only exists to be beautiful.

MADAME DE STAËL

The very sonority of the Italian language "which acts as a musical instrument," is a fault, because "it lulls the intellect into a dreamy lassitude."

Ossian's music also causes lassitude, but of another description, "it is the dreaminess produced by listening too long to the notes of an æolian harp."

The Italians have no more knowledge of melancholy than the Greeks.

"Their sensibility is not serious, their grandeur is not imposing, their sadness is not sombre."

If Italians do sometimes appear sorrowful, it is because they are struck suddenly by the fugitive nature of the joys of this life, which are so precious to them.

They have no conception of that other melancholy, "which is born of a yearning of the soul," which is the consequence of the emptiness that the soul discovers in this life, of the reverie which holds perpetual empire over the mind, with its incessant disquietude over weariness of life and ignorance of what death may hold."

We can easily see that the judgment is the same whether she is considering Southern Italy, or the Greece of Antiquity. Only the examples change.

And it is purely negative judgment.

The weakness which Madame de Staël is imagining into this literature, which she knows nothing about, is to serve as a foil to the energy of the Northern literature which she is going to discuss later.

Take notice, by the way, that France does not appear in the discussion of the literature of the South, although she has counted France in with the Southern nations, because of the period of Louis XIV.

It is curious to observe that she relegates the chapters on France to the end of the first part, where they immediately precede those which deal with French literature of the future.

That is to say that France comes at the edge of the system which exists solely in the interests of France.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

There are, indeed, two parts to this book, but the division does not lie where the eye finds it.

On closer inspection we shall see that the first part of *De la Littérature* is taken up to the chapter on Germany, and includes that, and the whole subject of Northern literature, dealt with both positively and negatively, with much jeering at the South.

The second part which is the whole of the rest of the book is consecrated entirely to France of the past, present, and future.

This was what she had intended from the very beginning.

DETAIL OF THE LITERARY THEORY: THE NORTH

Now we shall see Madame de Staël at grips with facts.

Practically in this connection the North means England and Germany.

Germany, so far, was little known, but French opinion on England was already formulated and had been during the whole century that it had attracted curious attention from France.

The tone of her prelude to observations on English literature, differs somewhat from her general defence of Northern literature.

In France the literature of the North is commonly reproached with a lack of style.

She admits that the objection may be well founded, even for Shakespeare, whom she is going to discuss later on.

But for her own part she prefers an imperfect work, which has great beauties and great failings (for her the work of Shakespeare falls under this heading), to any work which is "correct, but does not rise above mediocrity."

We get a definite impression that she has read (or

MADAME DE STAËL

what she calls "read") Shakespeare and she probably saw his plays acted during her London visit of 1776.

But there is no misunderstanding the note.

She admires him.

As one would expect: "Shakespeare . . . has the imprint of the spirit and general colour of Northern poetry."

He also anticipates the age of liberty.

Though he did not live in an age of democracy, his tragedies, far more than Racine's, are the expression of a people, which has plunged again and again into civil war in order to preserve what is the breath of life to them, their freedom.

We are made to feel vaguely that civil wars must have fashioned the soul of Shakespeare, though he lived before them; or, that he prepared the soul of the nation for the civil war which was to come half a century after his death.

Feeling perhaps that she is not on very solid ground, she passes on to her analysis.

"Shakespeare," she says, "has depicted the anguish of death and the divinity of mercy in an incomparable fashion."

He is the "king of terrors."

While bringing the portrayal of emotions to its very highest point, he renders it at the same time so personal, so intimate that "*your soul is carried to the heights of the master's emotion without going beyond the limits of its own range.*"

The supernatural element in Shakespeare's plays always owes something to philosophy, his are the "marvels of dreams," not those of childish and uninspiring mythology.

Thus, for example, the witches in Macbeth, are really projections from Macbeth's own soul where a frenzied struggle is taking place.

Of all the subjects treated by Shakespeare that which impresses the author of the *Folle de la Forêt de*

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

Sénart most is the portrayal of madness caused by unmerited misfortune.

Shakespeare confirms it by his tragic conception of love which shows us the course of Eros Anikate; passion, grief, madness, or, at any rate, the borders of madness.

The madness of Hamlet, Ophelia and Lear is in each case "the delirium of unbearable grief," which Shakespeare was the first to render at its most agonising poignancy, and his rendering constitutes for Madame de Staël, "the finest picture in existence of man's moral nature when the storms of life have shattered its powers of resistance."

These are the beauties which compensate in her eyes "for some tediousness, some vain repetitions and much incoherent imagery," faults which she attributes to the "ignorance of the principles of literature" prevalent in Shakespeare's day.

But she picks out other faults which she finds less pardonable.

In *Romeo and Juliet* she detects a strong dose of Italian affectation. She prefers *Othello*.

She finds the historical tragedies inferior to the imaginative tragedies.

And then there is a supreme failing which, after Voltaire, no one may pass over in silence, Shakespeare is everywhere far too much "on the side of the gross-minded."

Women had not begun to exercise their influence in favour of decency in those days.

Hence the comic relief in Shakespeare which succeeds the tragic scenes "and produces an unpleasant impression on men of taste."

"Hence the play on words, jokes, licentious or equivocal, popular tales and accumulation of proverbs in his work."

Hence those "scenes of horror" where physical torment is brought violently and gratuitously under

MADAME DE STAËL

the eyes of the spectators, and those misbegotten creatures like Caliban and Richard III, whose physical deformity disgusts the sensitive mind and offends the exacting eye.

These are legitimate observations and normal enough, though they are certainly more French in character than Nordic.

But they conceal serious distaste on her part.

Madame de Staël will have nothing to do with Shakespeare as a writer of comedy.

This soul made for modernity, as Madame de Staël puts it (but surely she means for all time) merely condescended to toss off a few comedies which are not worth dwelling upon and must be taken as a mere off-shoot of his eccentric genius.

Neither Shakespeare nor England, for that matter, knows anything about comedy.

How should they ? The North is not gay !

Falstaff is a " caricature for the popular mind."

She does summary justice to the comedies of Congreve.

She considers that, in the first place, they are not comedies, or if they are " nothing is more un-English than English comedy."

English humour is not composed of gaiety, but of irony.

It springs in a great measure from misanthropy, and has a strong tendency to melancholy, an attenuated melancholy.

From Shakespeare she turns to the other poets.

At the end of the book she says :

" We love poetry because it responds to grief in us and to emotions which master us, whether we will or not."

Here she says more explicitly :

" *Nothing is sweeter to us than to come upon our own dreams in the course of our reading, and if we try to recall our favourite pieces in all languages we*

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

invariably find that they all have the same character of melancholy and high inspiration."

At any rate, that is the general character of English poetry.

English poets have the art of uniting "philosophical reflections with the sensations produced by the loveliness of the country."

There is no monotony in their meditations; they are sad, but it is with a sadness which accords with the very nature of our beings and our destinies, a sublime sadness born of solitude.

Gray's *Elegy* and Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* "are full of that noble melancholy which makes the majesty of emotional philosophy."

Where can we find more poetic fire than in Dryden's *Ode to Music*?

"What passion is expressed in the *Letter to Heloise*!

"Above all, what enchantment in the description of love in marriage which we find in the last verses of Thomson's first song to Spring!

"What deep reflection is the *Essay on Man*! And how terrible are Young's *Night Thoughts*!"

His "sombre imagination," gives the general note of English poetry, though he has intensified it.

The author of *Paradise Lost* is England's greatest intellectual poet; in spite of his use of the allegory "which taste deplores," he understands how to wed the image with the thought.

But then the English language is more suited to literature than Italian.

Thanks to the "energy" with which it must be spoken, the tonic note in its hammer-rhythm, "it awakens the soul."

The English poets do not pay much attention to style, but because of their real emotions, like Shakespeare, they stand excused.

Everything which does not conform in English

poetry to Nordic culture is not really a part of that culture, but some excrescence.

Everything which aspires to unthinking gaiety in this country vowed to contemplation, is alien to the national character.

With the imperturbability of a Sultan in his pride, the ex-ambadress orders the heads of Chaucer and Spenser to be swept off with one blow of the scimitar.

"Spenser's *Faery Queene* is the most wearisome production in the world."

Butler's head must go too. He is unfortunate enough to prolong his jokes to the point of satiety, and he will make jokes!

She also orders the executions of Waller, Cowley and Doune, who all imitate the Italians.

At the same time, England being the country "where women are more genuinely loved and liked than in any other," it is a natural field for the most modern form of literature, the novel.

"*The existence of Englishwomen is the cause of the inexhaustible fecundity of English writers of fiction.*"

It is in this "power of loving" that English writers "find perpetually new and fruitful inspiration."

Every nation, she thinks, gets the fiction it deserves.

If France has no romances to compare with English novels it is because France has not the domestic virtues of England.

"Tyrannical laws and the grosser desires, or corrupt principles, have decided the fate of women in the ancient Republics, in the Orient and in France."

"In no other quarter of the world are women able to enjoy domestic happiness as they enjoy it in England."

France is a good place for love-affairs; but in England, husbands are in love with their wives as Necker was in love with his.

To cut the matter short, she sees English fiction as the apotheosis of married lovers.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

English romance was the fate which she had not tasted of and she would hanker after it to the end of her days.

But what made her regard Richardson as the high priest of virtuous and idyllic England?

There is little to uphold the view.

The facts lend themselves to an opposite interpretation.

But Madame de Staël always finds her own dreams in that type of literature.

"Nowhere are we more sensible of the charm of that protective love which makes it unnecessary for the object of it to take any care of herself and concentrates the fulfilment of her desires in the unvarying tenderness and respect of her champion."

So we find that English novels serve as a sort of supplement to Madame de Staël's vast experience by giving her dream-access to the secret orchard, the "garden enclosed" of perfect love, from which both her character and her circumstances for ever excluded her.

Germany already exercised a certain attraction over her mind and her heart.

That country was still only on the threshold of history and its literature, only a century old, was vast in extent and unexplored.

Nothing was finished, nothing had settled form or fixed intention.

This hypothesis must be given elbow-room; a dream roves through it, as though it were a poem of Ossian.

Germany may well turn out to be perfectible, for its inhabitants seem to her "fit for freedom."

Like a mother scolding a lazy child by pointing out the industry of his companions, Madame de Staël threatens France with a possible exodus of the best French minds to take refuge and to find a "spiritual home" in this new country, where already revolutions based only on philosophy had taken place.

"If France were destined by some invincible misfortune to lose her liberty some day, Germany would be the new centre of light."

Politically vast, Germany was still a child in leading-strings.

Her praise implies a shade of protection.

She does not see Germany as a possible enemy of France, which is the light in which she does see England, and takes good care not to hand over the future of intellectual attainment to that country.

Although German literature was only a few years old, it already had all the characteristics of modern and Northern literature.

The German mind "turns towards the contemplation of nature and self-analysis."

And wherever there is contemplation, we know that there will be melancholy.

The Germans excel in "describing painful emotions and melancholy images."

"There is no country where the writers have been more successful in sounding the depths of men's passions, of the sufferings of the human soul or of the resources in philosophy which can help men to bear them."

She has real knowledge of only one example.

But she does not want her embarrassment to be discovered, and it does not amount to much because she knows that the Parisians of the day are no better informed than herself.

She tosses up a little bunch of names, with or without comment.

Klopstock she has perhaps tried to read, but without success, since she accuses him of "tediousness and mysticism."

Schiller she mentions as the writer of tragedies which must proceed from a vital soul.

Then she passes rapidly and impatiently to Werther.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

For her the whole of German literature exists in Werther.

In 1795 she had classed it with *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Lettres Portugaises* as a miracle of words, which could only be really appreciated by the elect.

"The reading of such works," she said, "was consolation enough for the sorrows which spring from high attainments and acute sensibility."

At that time she did not dwell on it further, but here, really not knowing anything else about German literature, she gives a fairly detailed analysis of this "breviary of passion," which is the great possession of Germany and may be quoted as the equal of masterpieces in other languages.

"In Werther, a pure and energetic soul succumbs to the pressure of the social order.

The despair of unhappy love is enhanced by deep resentment against social sufferings.

Goethe wished to paint the workings of mixed evil, a being suffering at all the sensitive points of a proud and tender soul.

This is a malady of soul which is not general.

"Its source is only found in elevated natures."

Many a blameless being, hunted down by ingratitude and calumny, must have asked the same question which Werther answered so tragically.

Breathlessly this reader follows the fortunes and misfortunes of the hero, tasting at the end a supreme, almost voluptuous pleasure in that pistol-shot which does herself no harm.

For the rest, Germany has no more taste than England for anything connected with grace or gaiety.

It was not a good idea for their Wieland to try and imitate Voltaire by using the form of the philosophical tale.

The pungent wit and subtly-varied grace of the master would be difficult for a Frenchman to imitate; all the more reason that in a country like Germany,

where the "tribunal of society has little force," the attempt is frankly ridiculous.

If German writers need models in order to attain literary independence, let them turn to English models which are related to their own. Thus they will run less risk of defying their own natures.

This is excellent advice. But it severely limits the fine prospect of intellectual domination which Madame de Staël had held out to Germany.

We began to ask ourselves whether the literature of the North, even thus vaguely conceived, can satisfy all the sympathies and all the exactions of this French Swiss.

FRANCE

It turns out that it is not in Madame de Staël's programme to impose the whole of Northern literature on France. It is possible that she may once have cherished the idea. But she soon dropped it. She may have had a Nordic soul, but she certainly had French brains.

That is why she cannot refrain, as a good Frenchwoman, from firing a tremendous broadside into the walls of the Northern fortress before she leaves that field.

Germany gets off with a few scratches.

But old England, who cannot plead the crudity of youth, is made to sit, for one last unpleasant quarter of an hour, on the stool of repentance.

Some of Madame de Staël's criticisms carry a long way. We find her remarking on the existence of a "calculating spirit" in English philosophy and mentality, a want of disinterested idealism, which ill-accords with the supposed characteristics of the Nordic man, such as we have seen discussed in the foregoing pages.

Paradoxically she affirms that French philosophy,

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

though it has no less depth, draws more from imaginative sources than English philosophy.

She points out that the virtuous island, native heath of Richardson, has never founded a hierarchy of moralists as immoral France has done in men such as La Bruyère, Cardinal Retz and Montaigne.

In English literature, the whole genus of memoirs and confessions, which combine emotions with ideas, is completely lacking.

In a general way she thinks that English prose suffers from not being personal enough.

Above all, she considers that English writers are always sinners in respect of clarity; their style, she thinks, is neither concise nor precise enough.

“If a French writer were to take an English writer’s ideas he would make a better book of them.”

The Frenchwoman speaks there.

And we are not surprised when we come to her comments on the period of Louis XIV. to find that the defender of the North has changed her tone.

Madame de Staël does not see the literature of the *Roi-Soleil*’s reign as a forcible and virile art, but rather as a growth of Court and Salon, all grace and gaiety, fashioned in exquisite taste, essentially aristocratic in the sense of the word which prevailed up to the Revolution.

To tell the truth she looks at the Seventeenth Century through the Eighteenth Century; that is to say, she hardly sees it at all.

Apart from its excellence and purity of form, she notices nothing about it except that which differentiates it vexatiously from the period of the *Encyclopædia*; its political indifference.

It is not a literature of action, and where philosophy is concerned, the Eighteenth Century outshines it.

Having no aim but the pleasure of intellectual exercise, it could not vibrate with the energy of the literature which caused the Throne to totter . . .

generally speaking the books of that day did not deal with important subjects, and men of letters lived cut off from all the active interests of life.

They were withheld from participating in the principles of government, the examination into tyrannical dogma and, indeed, anything which might lead thought into action.

In the Eighteenth Century, on the contrary, it was recognised that literature was no longer "only an art," but was "a means to an end."

Looking at the question only from an artistic point of view, Madame de Staël is sincerely of opinion that far from having lost by this extension of its range, literature has made an artistic gain by becoming capable of incorporating a more intense life than before.

She feels far more emotion on hearing declamations from *Tancrède* than from *Phèdre*.

She can no longer find her way about Racine's work; he is not of her time.

But with Voltaire she is like a good hostess in her own house; knowing every corner of it and particularly knowing where she can be proud of it, and give her guests most pleasure.

Tancrède is "like a hero who has really lived; he is Narbonne, as he would have been, if he had played his part as he ought to have done.

He is Zulma, turned man and overwhelming a faithless mistress with his boundless generosity.

"His is a sublime nature and yet is in harmony with all good-hearted people."

Tancrède learning, on the point of death, that his Aménaïde has loved him always, and to the end, evoked a host of memories in her . . .

"It seems as if those whom we have loved *must* be with us in that uncertain future which lies beyond this life."

Oh! youth and Narbonne! Like Tancrède she can

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

almost forget the long road she has travelled since those days and can almost live her bliss again. . . .

“ Even if we have lost respect and lost belief in their love, even if we are deserted . . . still, what cries go up to the Supreme Being, the Master-mind, entreating that He will never break the chain of memories which binds two existences together.”

All the literature of the Eighteenth Century is sympathetic to her with differences of degree, of course.

She feels this sympathy at once, without having to force it in any way.

She would have preferred, no doubt, to find deeper emotions in it, but she was never troubled by the exactions of superficial sensibility ; if anything with which she was in contact lacked emotion, she simply supplied emotion from her own being.

It seems natural to her, and does not displease her, that prose should have taken a place above the poetic forms at this period.

She regards poetry as a preliminary, an almost physical means of pre-disposing the reader to listen favourably to the voice of a certain emotion ; as a means of evoking this emotion secretly, by a ruse as it were.

It annoys her to think of the pleasure which the spell of verse may give to the ignorant and untutored, who have no means of analysing their enjoyment and no idea of its real source.

And from the point of view of the writer, she considers that the poetic form introduces most undesirable rigidity and constraint.

She never had been able to understand the mania of the human being for shackling even his *pleasures* with laws, rules and dogma.

One could never have a surfeit of emotion and harmony if expressed in absolute liberty, in the free measure of prose, which knows no law but an implicit

MADAME DE STAËL

obligation to facilitate every possible communication of "life with life": prose which is supple to every indication of the "mobile soul," which is a *gift of nature* and a signal of the existence of conspicuous talent; prose, that exquisitely fluid mirror of emotion, registering every gleam, every shade, every breath that passes in the soul, is to her, the obvious instrument for literature with a purpose.

Compared with Seventeenth Century literature that of the Eighteenth Century has a purpose.

But the whole field had not been covered even so.

After all, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau contented themselves with being writers.

They would have been much astonished and, perhaps, not very pleased if they could have seen the intention of their work carried out.

Voltaire, for instance, "must have been afraid that he might really overthrow the objects of his attack."

What could he have jeered at, if the Catholic Church had ceased to exist?

In this direction Madame de Staël throws off her allegiance to him.

She rejects all the negative side of the Eighteenth Century.

She wants action, constructive, creative action.

"Philosophy itself," she says, "is only a frivolous occupation in a country where the Light-Bringers have no authority over the institutions.

If thought does not truly contribute to the amelioration of the lot of man it becomes an effeminate and pedantic occupation.

The writer who neither influences, nor wishes to influence the lives of others, cannot stamp his style or his ideas with the unmistakable seal of character and force of will."

We see where she is going to arrive.

Once more the circle has been completed.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

Men of letters must take possession of the land of their birth. Mental ability must rule over France.

Republican literature must concern itself primarily with the Republic, not furtively, as in the past, but in the broad light of day with the full approbation of all the authorities.

MADAME DE STAËL AS POET

The title of her book: *Literature considered in relation to social institutions*, is not the least important part of it.

This title alone marks a date in the history of critical literature.

It proclaims a grandiose conception, nothing less than the association of literature with the general history of humanity.

Madame de Staël's opinion on literary matters might well have been wavering: the condition of being an amateur has its advantages.

Criticism and literary history were still dealt with after the old methods of the Seventeenth Century, at the time when Madame de Staël was producing this book, and in spite of their fine attention to detail, these methods had the cumbersome awkwardness of the scholastic traditions of the Middle Ages.

Quite naïvely, almost inadvertently, Madame de Staël broke with these traditions.

She wanted to use literature for her own ends, for the benefit of humanity and France.

She was the first to associate literature with human institutions and thus she gets her back against a door which will presently open, so that the whole literary activity of the Nineteenth Century may pass through.

But though she finds the door she does not pass through it herself.

In 1719, Abbé Dubos had made an authoritative

MADAME DE STAËL

declaration that "physical causes determine the quality of the blood and the brain."

That just as there was a great physical difference between the Negro and the Muscovite, so there was a great difference between their respective arts and institutions.

This conclusion, which tended to confirm the existence of relativity in art, and of some "relation" between literature and human institutions, had been accepted by the leading minds of the Eighteenth Century, including Vauvenarges and Voltaire, but to the general mind was still, in 1800, a matter of hypothesis.

It remained for some one to prove by examination and comparison of the European literatures that this "relation" was actually in existence.

A fine work to embark on, but for its accomplishment hard labour was indicated.

Madame de Staël preferred to assume what she ought to have proved.

It seemed to her that literature must be relative to something, otherwise it would have been difficult to show the relation of her book to the French Revolution.

Her intention of carrying on propaganda leads her astray from the real quest.

The only "relation" which she has at heart is that which she supposed must exist between politics and literature.

The eternal human institutions, religion and the various moralities of different nations were all subordinate to that.

Then she put this supposed relationship between politics and literature at the service of a political theory, which was interesting, but not impartial when related to facts.

This sort of confused thought can only result in confusion. It was difficult to arrive at any clear

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

conclusion about literature from it. And, in fact, it was not arrived at.

She did not get further than the hypothesis indicated by the title, and the conclusions that she reaches are the convictions that she started with.

We have seen that the imposing edifice of this book rests on somewhat narrow foundations.

In point of fact, the system of *De la Littérature* is only an elaborated intuition which is to be taken as a historical discovery.

If we doubt it, the detail to be found in this apparently rigid frame proves it conclusively.

When we have taken Madame de Staël's opinions on Nordic, French and Republican literature and laid them end to end, we know approximately what the elements of her poetics are: introspection, passion, melancholy; alert and eloquent realism, principally attached to the solution of political, not personal problems; elegance, wit, taste, style, and in that style, impetuous energy and warmth.

It is difficult to conceive of a literature wide enough in range to contain all that, and it is impossible to conceive of an impersonal doctrine which would reconcile all these contradictory claims.

It was not for nothing that Madame de Staël's researches led her across the entire field of European literature. No one literature could satisfy her, she would have required the whole world for the full recognition and expression of herself.

The literary doctrine of *De la Littérature* must bear the name of de Staël. It is entirely relative to herself.

That is to say that there really is no doctrine, which she herself admits in the second edition of the book.

But in default of a doctrine, Madame de Staël does not fail to be excessively interesting in herself.

There is no obligation to swallow her personality whole. It will be enough to take her intellectual curiosity about foreign literature, her intimate need

MADAME DE STAËL

of emotional experience, and her preliminary attitude of sympathetic attention.

These things taken together, make up both an inspiration and a programme for criticism.

As for artists, as for the real creators of literature, Madame de Staël has plenty of advice for them, and, indeed, the whole of the last part of the book is given up to that advice.

But this last section of *De la Littérature* has less significance or substance than the rest.

To arrive at this opinion there is no need to know of the existence, as Fontanes did, of that other book which was in preparation on the same subject and which did appear before long.

This obstinate woman-administrator had taken it into her head that she would plan out the literary constitution of New France, in advance, and that without having devoted to the subject more than a fraction of her mental power.

This last section of the book is more or less given up to repetition in positive form of the general ideas of the whole book.

An artist after having assimilated and approved these ideas, if he did approve them, would find himself just where he was before, asking himself what steps he was to take for the production of these Republican tragedies and comedies, and novels with a purpose, for which the great lady, writing the book, gave no special recipe.

Madame de Staël leaves the artist to the contemplation of his enterprise, merely loaded with a large sack of theories, without an atom of information as to the actual difficulties of performance.

To tell the truth, this is not the abstention of discretion on the writer's part, due to her great respect for Art.

She does not use a capital A, and does not conceive of art as an end, but as a means.

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

She thinks of art as a means of rousing emotion ; just that : *and to create an emotional experience in others you must supply it from an emotional experience in yourself.*

And you should be able to glide as easily as possible from the intention to the result.

So she thinks that poetry is a sort of music, rather more explicit than music, but giving the same results, rousing emotion as a caress rouses it, giving a little impulse to the soul which is thus cast off upon an ocean of delicious emotional experience where it can drift at will.

Poetry may have the effect which the long cry of waves breaking on the shore certainly would have ; or like a beautiful dying evening, it may dissolve the soul in the last ecstasy of a twilight of violet and grey and rose, which are fading away.

If poetry is less operative in this respect than music, or certain sounds and aspects of nature, she thinks it is because the technical restrictions involved in all art come too obviously between the point of departure and the destination, between the poet and his hearer.

This delays transition and constitutes an unfortunate diversion.

Instead of the two souls, the poet and his hearer merging together, they are compelled to draw back and scrutinise each other ; the impulse falls powerless and owing to this delay, in her opinion, the two souls do not meet but remain where they started.

It was her own artistic incapacity in this direction which gave Madame de Staël such a restricted idea of the power of poetry ; and this incapacity was partly a matter of education, but was more essentially due to lack of a natural poetic gift.

Hers is a perfectly legitimate conception of the value of poetry and does not differ very much from that of the Symbolists of the end of the Nineteenth Century.

MADAME DE STAËL

Like them Madame de Staël will have nothing to do with clear-cut, vivid images, charged with dramatic significance.

Such images shock her conceptions of the lyric.

She wants poetry to be satisfying to that side of herself which complains when she is weary after inordinate self-expression, which aspires to repose and to tranquillity, which is elegiac in its tendencies and not active.

She conceives of poetry as a refuge, not a field for mental exercise, and desires to hear in it, or to think she hears in it, the notes which are soothing to her wounded soul.

Poetry, a certain type of poetry, is indispensable to her art of living, but it need not be poetry in verse.

The type that she was feeling for was created four years after her death by the author of the *Méditations*.

It seemed to her that there was a certain hostility between emotion and the image, especially between acute emotions and the image expressed at length.

As a principle there is no valid objection to this.

But to Madame de Staël it was an actual truth.

She argues from what is within her and will not compromise upon any one of her exactions.

The doctrine hardly seems a romantic one, but the attitude is excessively so.

For the matter of that, it is one of her attitudes.

She had not the slightest intention of spending her life in complaint and languid repose ; on the contrary it was her considered intention to make a progressive reduction of her elegiac and contemplative Ego in order to free the other side of herself for action more completely.

It follows from this that she puts poetry and even meditative, or, as she expresses it, "philosophical" poetry (wrongly called intellectual poetry by some critics who give that name to a sort of hybrid between poetry and prose) into the second rank of the hierarchy

WINDING UP THE CRISIS: 2nd PHASE

of types of literature which would be cultivated by the most energetic writers of the new Republic.

Whatever pleasure she may derive from poetry, it is obvious that poetry is not really what she was made for. Her means lie in eloquence, and her end is action.

It is in the last pages of the last chapter of this book, consecrated to the future of France, that she proclaims the one and only principle of her own poetics.

“ I know how easy it would be to criticise me for mixing the personal predilections of my soul with the general subject-matter of this book. *But it is impossible to me to separate my ideas from my feelings ;* it is emotion which excites thought and which alone supplies the mind with a power of deep and rapid penetration. Our affections must, of necessity, modify all our opinions.

“ We love some works, because they respond to our griefs and to memories which master us without our wish or our knowledge ; above all we admire certain works, because they have the power to stir our moral beings to their very depths, to their full capacities.

There are cold beings who desire that nothing shall be presented to their estimation but the perceptions of pure reason, leaving in the shade all emotional movements, all regrets and mistakes, indeed all the flowers of dream which can never arouse their interest.

“ I resign myself to their adverse criticism.

“ *Indeed how could I escape it ?*

“ *How can I build a wall between my talents and my soul ?*

“ *How can I dismiss what I feel and yet give utterance to my thought ?*

“ *How can I impose silence on the feelings which have intense life within me, and yet give voice to the ideas which my emotions have discovered to my mind ?*

“ What sort of literary work should I produce from all those denials to the very spark of life in my being ?

“ Is it not better to embody in my work all those

MADAME DE STAËL

failings which are implied in abandonment to one's nature ? ”

The literary work which is built on this ambiguous inspiration is naturally ambiguous in result. We might foresee that.

Going to work in the same way as the poets of the *Nuits*, the *Méditations* and the *Destinées* of some years later, she brought into the world a series of apparently objective dissertations, which do not seem to have any other subject than herself.

Reading them, after a lapse of more than a hundred years, we retrace our steps over the road on which Madame de Staël's talent advanced and we find ourselves at the Source, at the living centre of her created work which seems dead ; we have found a soul, her soul which she could not separate from her intellect.

We may say that from this time onward, Madame de Staël had full knowledge of herself as a woman and a writer.

That is what her life and her work had given her.

From the year 1800 onward, the impetuous creature having “ put a girdle round the earth,” that is to say, round herself, was a conscious personality, capable of action.

Only some of us ever get to that point, and we must by no means under-rate the importance of such a result.

We end on a question !

With her character and her talents, what would she do next ? What was there left for her to do ?

APPENDIX A

VERSE BY MADAME DE STAËL QUOTED IN THIS VOLUME.

LE COMTE (À SOPHIE).

(See pages 42, 43).

“ Votre félicité, croyez-moi m’est bien chère
Et pour elle je fais tout que je dois faire.
Je vais jusqu’ à vouloir vous donner le bonheur
De trouver un épouse digne de votre cœur,
De former par l’amour les nœuds de l’hyménée.
Dieu ! que je sens le prix de cette destinée !
Qu’ils étaient nés heureux, ceux que l’arrêt du sort
A conduits l’un vers l’autre, et qui, sans nul remords
Eprouvant de l’amour l’invincible puissance,
Goûtent et ses plaisirs et ceux de l’innocence !
L’espoir dans le printemps couronne l’avenir ;
Mais quand nos jeunes ans commencent à nous fuir,
Cessant de désirer les jours qu’on doit attendre,
Vers l’éternelle nuit le temps semble descendre :
Plus de bonheur pour nous. Que ce mortel heureux
Qui possède à jamais l’objet de tous ses vœux
Voit sous un autre aspect et le temps et la vie !
Ses jours s’écouleront auprès de son amie ;
Il doit dans l’avenir retrouver le présent ;
Un plaisir vif et pur doit marquer chaque instant :
Des jours dont constamment se forme son année,
Un seul embellirait une autre destinée !
Ce que je dis pour nous de même est vrai pour vous ;
Ce sort pour une femme est sans doute aussi doux :
Vous pouvez l’espérer, vous êtes libre encore
Ah ! n’y renoncez pas. . . ”

MADAME DE STAËL

SOPHIE.

“ Language que j'adore !
Votre voix retentit jusqu'au fond de mon cœur,
Oui, vous avez raison ; oui, c'est là le bonheur.”

LA COMTESSE.

(See pages 43, 44).

“ A votre âge, souvent l'on ignore, Sophie,
D'un lien fortuné la douceur infinie ;
Mais un jour vous saurez ce qu'éprouve le cœur,
Quand un vrai sentiment n'en fait pas le bonheur ;
Lorsque sur cette terre on se sent délaissée,
Qu'on n'est d'aucun objet la première pensée ;
Lorsqu'on peut souffrir, sûre que ses douleurs
D'aucun mortel jamais ne font couler les pleurs.
On se désintéresse à la fin de soi-même,
On cesse de s'aimer, si quelqu'un ne nous aime ;
Et d'insipides jours, l'un sur l'autre entassés,
Se passent lentement et sont vite effacés.
Ne pensez pas non plus qu'il suffise, Sophie,
De songer au bonheur dans l'hiver de la vie ;
Celui qu'on goûte alors du passé doit venir ;
Ceux qui nous ont aimés peuvent seuls nous chérir.
C'est par le don heureux des jours de sa jeunesse
Qu'on mérite l'amour jusque dans la vieillesse.
Le cœur qui fut à nous vit de ses souvenirs,
Et les prend quelquefois pour de nouveaux plaisirs (1).”

(See page 46).

“ Cette éducation lugubre et solitaire,
De son impression frappa son caractère :
Elle ne croyait plus dès l'enfance au bonheur,
Et l'on avait trop tôt peut-être ému son cœur.

APPENDIX A

Elle en pourra souffrir, mais son charme en augmente ;
Qui saurait imiter cette grâce touchante ?
Elle conserve encore, déjà dans son printemps,
La vérité qu'à peine on retrouve aux enfants ;
Et dans les mouvements de cette âme si pure,
On apprend à connaître, à sentir la nature (1)."

(See pages 47, 48).

“ Vous qu’avec passion l’on est forcé d’aimer,
 Vous pour qui la raison apprend à s’enflammer,
 Et dont l’heureux talent de penser et de plaire,
 Unit pour vous vanter la France et l’Angleterre ;
Vous que vos qualités n’égarèrent jamais,
 Vertueux sans rigueur et tendre sans excès ;
 Qui possédez enfin ce qui semble s’exclure,
 Tous les dons opposés qu’accorde la nature.
 Les préjugés par vous sont tous anéantis. . . ; (1)

JANE GREY.

(See page 51).

“ Le temps aurait peut-être altéré notre sort,
Et notre cœur, un jour glacé par la vieillesse,
Eût de la passion moins ressenti l'ivresse.
Nous mourrions tout entiers ; notre dernier soupir
D'un cœur brûlant d'amour peut encore sortir.”

GUILDFORD.

1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	3	4	5	6

Ah ! De la passion je sens que le délire
Peut m'exalter assez pour mêler du plaisir
A l'horreur que ce jour doit faire ressentir."

MADAME DE STAËL

JANE GREY

“ Ah ! mon unique ami, l'âme passionnée
Qui sut unir l'amour aux nœuds de l'hyménée
De la félicité goûta trop la douceur
Pour savoir supporter l'atteinte du malheur.

.
C'est sentir qu'on est deux de craindre un sacrifice.”

FROM L'ÉPÎTRE AU MALHEUR.

(See pages 144, 145).

“ Souvent les yeux fixés sur ce beau paysage,
Dont le lac avec pompe agrandit les tableaux,
Je contemplais ces monts qui, formant son rivage
Peignent leur cime auguste au milieu de ces eaux :
Quoi ! dirais-je, ce calme où se plaît la nature
Ne peut-il pénétrer dans mon cœur agité ?
Et l'homme seul, en proie aux peines qu'il endure
De l'ordre général serait-il excepté ? ”

(See page 145).

“ O malheur ! les Français ont fondé ton empire ;
On luttait contre toi, tu règnes maintenant ;
L'Espoir de t'échapper paraît un vain délire
Et la raison n'est plus que le choix du tourment.”

(See page 146).

“ Barbares . . . non jamais ni la mort, ni l'histoire
Ne pourront dignement venger tous vos forfaits.”

APPENDIX A

“ Un jeune homme innocent, même des nouveaux crimes
Qu’une loi tyrannique exprime vaguement.

Près d’Adèle, Edouard vivait obscurément.”

(See page 146).

“ D’autres pleins de vertus, livrés à la vengeance,
Par autant de douleurs comptent leurs sentiments,
Ne peuvent secourir la vieillesse et l’enfance,
Et les plus doux liens sont leur plus grands tourments.”

(See page 147).

“ . . . les fureurs de l’envie
Peuvent poursuivre même au comble des malheurs ;
Sur les débris du monde on voit la calomnie
Seule rester debout, et régner sur les pleurs.
Vous avez ressenti ses atteintes cruelles,
Par ses lâches poisons vous êtes déchirés,
Vous, de la liberté les défenseurs fidèles,
Et de tous les exès ennemis déclarés,
Echappés à la France, une erreur implacable
Des plus purs sentiments s’apprête à vous punir ;
Aux yeux du préjugé, qui pensait est coupable,
Et qui raisonne encore sans doute vent trahir.”

(See page 148).

“ De tout ce qu’on aimait la vie est séparée ;
Sans cesser d’être, ou craint de ne se voir jamais ;
Vers un monde nouveau notre âme est attirée,
L’Amérique ou la mort nous promettent la paix.
De la nature enfin le cours invariable
A travers tant de maux ne s’est point arrêté ;
La mort, comme autrefois se montre impitoyable,
Et l’hymen le plus saint n’en est pas respecté,

MADAME DE STAËL

L'amour peut être ingrat et l'amitié légère ;
Et sous le poids affreuse des communes douleurs
Nourrissant en secret une peine étrangère,
Seule, a d'autres chagrins on donne encore des pleurs."

APPENDIX B

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED.

Madame de Staël—

- Œuvres Complètes (1820).
- Sophie ou les Sentiments Secrets. (Play.)
- Jane Grey. (Play.)
- Histoire de Pauline. (Early Novel.)
- Mirza. (Early Novel.)
- Adélaïde et Théodore. (Early Novel.)
- L'Histoire de Zulma. (Novel.)
- L'Éloge de Guibert.
- Du Caractère de M. Necker.
- Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine.
- L'Épître au Malheur.
- Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
- Réflexions sur la Paix adressées à M. Pitt et aux Français.
- Réflexions sur la Paix Intérieure.
- L'Essai sur les Fictions.
- Considérations sur la Révolution Française.
- De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations.
- Recueil de Morceaux Détachés.
- Des Circonstances Actuelles qui peuvent terminer la Révolution Française et des Principes qui doivent fonder la République en France. (Pamphlet not printed until 1906, by M. John Viénot.)
- De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales.
- L'Allemagne.
- Dix Années d'Exile.

APPENDIX B

- Benjamin Constant*—
Réactions Politiques.
- D'Haussonville*—
Le Salon de Madame Necker.
- Madame Necker*—
Mélanges.
- Madame du Deffand*—
Lettres à Horace Walpole.
- Kohler*—
Madame de Staël et la Suisse.
- Madame de Genlis*—
Mémoires.
- Blennerhasset*—
Madame de Staël
- Geffroy*—
Gustave III. et la Cour de France.
- Sainte-Beuve*—
Portraits de Femmes.
Portrait Contemporains.
- Bell's British Theatre, Vol. 7 (1776). Rowe*—
Lady Jane Grey.
- Pariset*—
French Translation of Journal of Gouverneur Morris.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau*—
La Nouvelle Héloïse.
Amours de Milord Edouard.
- Étienne*—
Le Genre Romanesque en France.
- Tourneau*—
Correspondence Littéraire de Grimm, etc.
- Baronne d'Oberkirch*—
Mémoires.
- Malouet*—
Mémoires.
- Rudler*—
La Jeunesse de Benjamin Constant.
- Faguet*—
Politiques et Moralistes du XIX^{ième} Siècle.
- Taine*—
Ancien Régime.

MADAME DE STAËL

Comte. de Segur—

Mémoires.

Roustan—

Les Philosophes et la Société Française au XVIII^{ème}
Siècle.

Madame d'Arblay—

Diary and Letters.

Ritter—

Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France.

Viatte—

Madame de Staël et Lavater d'après des documents
inédits.

Souriau—

Les Idées Morales de Madame de Staël.

Paul Gautier—

Matthieu de Montmorency et Madame de Staël.

Madame de Staël et Napoléon.

Le Premier Exile de Madame de Staël. (Revue des deux
Mondes, Vol. 33, 1906.)

Baron de Barante—

Souvenirs.

Godwin—

Political Justice.

Chapuisat—

Madame de Staël et la Police.

Madame de Staël et le Résident Deportes.

Van Tieghem—

Ossian en France. (Paris, 1917.)

Charles de Villiers—

Article on Madame de Staël in the Spectateur du Nord,
Vol. 3, 1799.

Isler—

Briefe aus des Nachlass von C de Villiers. (Hambourg,
1879.)

Witmer—

Charles de Villiers. (Paris, 1908.)

Baldensperger—

Goethe en France.

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Note, Page 5.

Notice, page 39, Vol. I, *Œuvres Complètes* (1820). Sismondi was of the same opinion : " With her, inspiration was instantaneous ; a whole sequence of ideas presented itself to her in a flash and she added nothing to it by further reflection." (Merlet, *Tableau de Littérature française*, Vol. III, page 272. Note 1.)

Note, Page 7.

Quoted from Mlle. Huber. Notice, page 27.

Note, Page 14.

It appears that, after all, the project of this marriage had never been mooted to Pitt. (See Lecky's article in the *Forum*, April, 1891.)

Note, Page 32.

See *d'Haussonville, op. cit.*, Vol. II, page 65. Like Corinne whose death was delayed until she had assembled her friends for a last reading of her verses.

Note, Page 53.

This study of Madame de Staël's early efforts to write plays is only concerned with the printed works and is therefore, limited by the choice made by Auguste de Staël among his mother's manuscripts for the 1820 edition of the *Œuvres Complètes*.

MADAME DE STAËL

Two MSS remain at Coppet, both historical tragedies of which one, *Montmorency*, was written three years before *Jane Grey*. (See letter of Rosalie de Constant to Madame de Chamière, quoted by Köhler, page 122.) The other play, *Jean de Witt*, belongs to the Directoire period (1799). Madame de Staël also wrote a play for the opening of the *States General* (1789), a tragedy of which the scene is laid in Persia and in which, "an enlightened sovereign advised by a sagacious minister, wishes to bestow on his subjects all the privileges of liberty and to call together their delegates in a deliberative assembly." Count d'Haussonville, from whom that passage is quoted (*Revue des deux Mondes*, March 1, 1913), does not state whether he is writing from hearsay or whether he has seen the MS. We must stand excused for not having been able to consult Mr. Benzon's work: *Madame de Staël og Theatret, Copenhagen*, 1906, but, however good his study is, it could not take the place of Madame de Staël's own text, which ought now to be printed in its entirety.

For we disagree with Count d'Haussonville on this question, and believe that it is only by printing all Madame de Staël's work, good and bad, that we shall render the best service to her memory.

We have proved the documentary value of such poor attempts at literature as *Sophie* and *Jane Grey*.

Madame de Saussure asserts that *Montmorency* contains "some very fine scenes," in spite of the stagey character of the hero, who is "urged to rebellion by an ambitious woman."

By writing this piece Madame de Staël drew attention to her friendship with Matthieu de Montmorency.

On April 13th, Gouverneur Morris, after a reading of the play given by Madame de Staël herself, notes in his journal that "the character of Cardinal Richelieu is drawn with a masterly hand." (*Journal of Gouverneur Morris*, translated by Pariset, p. 225.) In any case the piece cannot be void of psychological interest. This must also be the case in the Persian tragedy, where the "sagacious minister" is certainly drawn from Necker, and Count d'Haussonville considers that *Jean de Witt* is a study of Bonaparte.

Note, Page 55.

Madame de Charrière's judgment is as hasty as it is categoric: "What it all amounts to is merely . . . a little wit, neither apposite nor precise; a lot of fine writing, but that very disconnected; and much violent action on the part of persons of who all die violent deaths by poison, or from love, anguish, etc., etc. . . . None of all this succeeds in interesting us, or in moving us in the least. . . . (Paullieur, *Etudes sur l'Histoire Littéraire de la Suisse-Française*.)

Note, Page 64.

See *Geffroy*, Vol. I, page 336. In a letter of November, 1776, the Comte. du Creutz tells the King of Sweden that M. de Staël has arrived in Paris fully determined to make his way there; and "is very well-received at Court; all the pretty women in Paris would tear my eyes out if I did not exert myself in his interests. Madame de la Marck and Madame de Luxembourg would have no mercy on me."

In a second letter of 20th May, 1778, he adds that "the Comtesse de Polignac has a very tender feeling for M. de Staël, and he has been taken up by all the foremost women, like Madame de Chalons, the Comtesse Diana and Madame de Goutaud."

Note, Page 88.

See also towards the end of Chapter III, *Dix Années d'Exil*: "The talent which gave me fame has always brought me more joy than sorrow."

Note, Page 89.

This is inexact. The *Académie* announced as a competition in 1788—a Eulogy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Madame de Staël probably had some idea of entering for it.

MADAME DE STAËL

Note, Page 104.

M. Paul Gautier does not agree with this. He writes :
" M. de Staël was a very good man, kind and of excellent disposition all round, though in ability not above the average." (*Matthieu de Montmorency et Madame de Staël*, page 93.)

But we consider that his moral as well as intellectual insignificance was proved by the negligible place which he filled in his wife's estimation, for she was always enthusiastic over any mental or moral value. If her husband had had any mental or moral significance, Madame de Staël would certainly have recognised it. But a whole biography might be written on this subject. It is very much to be desired that the letters exchanged between husband and wife should be published. A certain number of them, at any rate, have been preserved at Coppet.

Note, Page 106.

We do not feel that the moral significance of *Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau* has been exactly estimated. We must realize not only that it presents a marriage-problem, but we must also realize exactly what that problem amounts to.

Lady Blennerhasset is a long way from that when she authorizes Madame Necker de Saussure's observation that the *Lettres* were composed before Madame de Staël was " caught in the storm " (*Notice*, page 58), in order to make us believe that they were composed before her marriage.

This interpretation will not hold water, and if one more proof is desired we have only to refer to the first edition of the *Lettres*, in which Madame de Staël, carried away by her enthusiasm, exclaims on behalf of Emile :
" Yes, my little daughter, for your sake, I will listen to Rousseau's teaching ! "

This passage was suppressed by the editors of 1820, as Köhler has pointed out, but was preserved in the *Correspondence* of Grimm, where the docile Meister quotes it. (Vol. 15, page 379). Madame Necker de Saussure would never have alluded to a marriage in her

APPENDIX C

family with so little exactitude or so much indiscretion. The "storm," is, of course, the French Revolution, which, according to the just estimate of Madame de Saussure, cuts Madame de Staël's career into two portions.

For the rest, we may not find ourselves upheld in all the conclusions we have drawn from the *Lettres*.

We have entered that mysterious region where truth is more easily felt than demonstrated.

Note, Page 113.

This bone was probably quite sufficiently picked by contemporary criticism. But it is doubtful whether the young Madame de Staël was aware of it.

She certainly never dreamt of putting up a defence for the mannish type of woman because she knew herself to be a hundred miles removed from the type.

Posterity, thanks perhaps to Talleyrand's dictum on *Delphine*, and to Madame de Staël's own mania for interviewing people, has classed her in the category to which she certainly does not belong. No one who knows anything of her life could accept this classification.

Note, Page 119.

Considérations, Vol. I, page 370. See also M. Bouilly's *Soirées chez Madame de Staël* (1833), which refers to the years 1789 and 1790.

It is difficult to decide how far we may rely on this little pamphlet by a writer of melodrama. He himself relies on distant memories. But, at any rate, the portrait that he gives of Madame de Staël is valuable in itself. He speaks of her "devouring eyes," her "blotched complexion" and "arid lips," her "sonorous voice" and "imperious gestures."

Note, Page 122.

On Oct. 29th, 1791, Gouverneur Morris notes in his journal: "Her father's dismissal has caused her acute suffering." The moral significance of this crisis in her life cannot be exaggerated.

MADAME DE STAËL

Note, Page 123.

This comparison was suggested to Madame de Staël by Chénier's piece, *Charles IX*, which was first presented at the Theatre Français on 14th November, 1789. Chénier drew the character of the Chancellor of the *Hôpital* from Necker.

Note, Page 126.

For a specimen of this see the *Journal de la Cour et de la Ville*, especially the numbers of March 1st, March 18th, and May 8th, 1791.

Note 1, Page 128.

Letter to Fersen, quoted Blennerhasset, Vol. II, page 97.

Note 2, Page 128.

The article was entitled: *A quels signes peut-on connaître quelle est l'opinion de la Majorité de la Nation.*

Note, Page 130.

Considérations, Vol. II, Chap. X, *Anecdotes particulières*. She arrived at Coppet on the 7th September (P. Gautier, *Matthieu de Montmorency et Mme. de Staël*, page 11.)

Her passport was made out in the words: "In consideration of her state of pregnancy." (*Revue des documents historiques*), 1878, page 118.

Note, Page 133.

This is also Sainte-Beuve's opinion, for he is always anxious to see Madame de Staël in the best light.

Note, Page 142.

Du Caractère de M. Necker: Madame Necker died on the 15th May, 1794.

Note, Page 149.

See *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, Oct., 1923. Article by M. Viatte. The interview must have taken place on the 13th and 14th April, 1794. A letter of Lavater's (published by Lénac de Meilham), *Du Gouvernement des mœurs et des conditions en France avant la Révolution*. (Hambourg, 1795, page 196) tells us that this was not Madame de Staël's first interview with Lavater.

Lavater went to Bâle on the 29th July, 1789, on purpose to dine with Madame de Staël and Necker. (See *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, April-June, 1795, page 365. *Account of Madame de Staël* by Madame la Comtesse de Pange.

Note, Page 151.

See Blennerhasset, Vol. II, page 229. For Constant's life up to his meeting with Madame de Staël see *La Jeunesse de Benjamin Constant* by Gustave Rudler.

Note, Page 156.

"Even in novels," exclaims Madame de Staël, "we find no exaggeration of the heights of passion to which a man may be driven by the fear that his love is not reciprocated." (*Œuvres*, Vol. 5, page 24.)

Evidently she was flattered by Constant's artifices. We know from Constant's journal that she was unable to conceal her delight when he smashed his watch, because she told him it was time for him to leave her.

According to Madame de Pange, Constant did fear that his passion would remain ungratified, up to September, 1795.

Madame de Surilly asks in a letter written 6th September, 1795: "Is Madame de Staël still keeping Constant in despair?" (*Revue des deux Mondes*, 15 Oct., 1924. *Un Amour de Madame de Staël*.)

Note, Page 173.

Sainte-Beuve, in his *Portraits de Femmes*, assures us that the *Essai sur les Fictions* contains all the poetics of

MADAME DE STAËL

Delphine ; and every one after that, repeated this curious affirmation without asking whether it was well-founded, or even asking what the eminent critic meant by his remark. We have seen that it is impossible to extract any theory on romantic fiction that will hold water from this Essay. Madame de Staël is not really thinking of fiction, but of the Revolution, and even so, she cannot decide on the best type of fiction for the object in view.

What do the poetics of the Essay consist of ? Is it the theory that she presents to the Revolutionists or the theory that she reserves for herself and the passionate elect.

The rest of Sainte-Beuve's observations shew clearly that the poetics of the Essay are contained in the panegyric on love-fiction which winds up the Essay. And we must add that this is flat contradiction of the central theme and only brought in as a digression.

Is Sainte-Beuve really mistaken or is he using his subtle psychology to impose on Madame de Staël the real convictions of her heart, rejecting at the same time all that with her was only the product of her intelligence ?

The best course would be to avoid discussion of something which did not exist. At that time Madame de Staël had no poetics.

We do not find poetics in *Delphine*, but a woman, the same woman who had written *Adélaïde et Théodore* nine years before the *Essai sur les Fictions*.

It is to be noted that the opinions of Goethe and Schiller on *l'Essai sur les Fictions*, though mainly favourable, include certain reservations. Goethe, who translated the *Essai* for the second number of *Les Heures*, 1796, notes its " incoherence and feminine want of system." Schiller's remark is that there is " more dazzle than light in it."

For all this see Joret, *Madame de Staël et la cour littéraire de Weimar* (no date), page 35.

Note, Page 174.

Probably written during the last weeks of 1794, printed by the Chevalier de Pange at La Neuveville, where he

APPENDIX C

had set up printing-works (see Madame de Pange, *Un Amour de Madame de Staël. Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th Oct., 1924, page 832, published in Feb., 1795. Anon, Köhler, *op. cit.*, page 175).

Note, Page 181.

See the fine letter of November 24th, 1796, in which she reveals her attitude towards the Directoire to Alexandre de Lameth (*Revue des Documents Historiques*), 1878, page 120.

Note, Page 189.

"I must confess that the society of Geneva people is insupportable to me. Their freedom of speech simply results in insolence and their impeccable morals in infinite tedium.

"In any case, a small town is the worst scene of action in the world for exceptional people. Every word they let fall is destined to be torn to shreds by the gossips. I am sure that in Geneva, my father and I assume the significance of the States General in Paris. To create a stir without winning glory is only an unmitigated nuisance."

Letter (no date) of Madame de Staël to her husband, quoted by d'Haussonville. See *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th Feb., 1913, page 730.

Note, Page 198.

Œuvres, Vol. III, page 39. The amplitude and reality of the problem are very well-defined by Matthieu de Montmorency in a letter of May, 1796. "Her heart and imagination have so much influence on each other, and the nobility of her character makes her unable to conceive of dealings which are well within the region of the possible for three-quarters of mankind. Her position as to family, society and more general relationships is so bizarre and complicated, the present is so tormenting for her, and the future so uncertain, that I must confess myself beaten by the problem of it all. I cannot see how she is ever to lead the quiet life which is so necessary for her." (See P. Gautier, *Madame de Staël et Matthieu de Montmorency*.)

MADAME DE STAËL

Note, Page 203.

From the text of the *Passions* it is easy to disentangle two threads of which it is impossible to mistake the significance.

One is an expression of bitterness and disillusion, and belongs to the past and to Narbonne; the other is optimistic and confident and relates to Constant and, therefore, to her present and future.

"Perhaps at this very moment of writing I am loved once more, perhaps I have given my destiny into the care of my love."

This phrase of hers has an air of being a last moment's confession, scribbled down just before the manuscript of the *Passions* was sent off to the printer.

At that date, the spring of 1796, there was no one but the assiduous Benjamin, whom Madame de Staël could reasonably regard as a lover. Constant, who later on was to lead her through the whole gamut of anguish, was no more than a postscript to the tragic document of the *Passions*.

We must not leave her emotional experiences between 1794 and 1796 unexplored. During this interval the *Passions* took definite shape in her mind, and until recently there has been very little information available as to this period.

A correspondence recently published by the Comtesse de Pange in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th Oct., 1924, *Un Amour de Madame de Staël* has filled the gap.

It appears that during these two years, she was trying to attach to herself as a lover, *not* Constant, but the Chevalier François de Pange, the "beloved friend" of the unhappy Chénier.

It is quite likely that it was not until the news of his marriage in February, 1796, burst disastrously over Coppet that Madame de Staël put away all hope of winning the heart of this splendid young fellow, and began to show real favour to the plebeian and unromantic Constant.

This disappointment cannot have failed to influence her work at the time; but she gives very little sign of it, and the reason is obvious. The experience was not of a

nature that a woman is anxious to relate. We are told that Madame de Staël had indicated that her love was at the Chevalier's disposal, and that he had answered by offering his friendship, even making it a condition that she was not to try to overstep that boundary.

This, no doubt, accounts for her tart remarks on friendship between people of opposite sex. But we cannot expect really reliable information as to the actual details of this episode.

Even if the Chevalier did play the unpleasing part assigned to him by his descendant, Madame de Staël never bore him a grudge. After all, he had been very candid and strictly honourable, and she was the woman to appreciate it. She may even have been grateful to him finally for having given her imagination a point of departure, giving her an opportunity for endless dreams and no opportunity for disillusion.

Madame de Staël admits that in writing her chapter on *Love* she consulted her own dreams rather than her observation of the passion in others, and the vision of the Chevalier certainly cannot have been absent from the dreams which inspired those beautiful pages.

The part which Narbonne played, however, in the chapter on *Love*, remains intact, for, side by side with the panegyric of ideal love we find the lament of the deserted woman, a lament which cannot justly be laid at the door of the Chevalier de Pange.

When Madame de Staël insists on the moral insignificance of some men in contrast with their mental and physical charm, she is undoubtedly thinking of Narbonne, for these observations are only a continuation of *Zulma*, a story which is an actual account of her liason with Narbonne.

The interlude with the Chevalier de Pange, nevertheless, throws a curious light upon the moral condition of Madame de Staël at the time of finishing the *Passions*.

When in this book she recommends herself not to give up hope of happiness in love, we know that she is searching for a love that is not too dissimilar to her first love.

Narbonne, at any rate, had satisfied her parching thirst for romance.

MADAME DE STAËL

She was now demanding (and believed that she recognised in the Chevalier) that combination which, later, she declared that she saw in the Prince de Ligne : "Narbonne, *with a heart*." She had had her warning of the dangers to which her appetite for romance exposed her.

But she was neither elderly, nor cowardly enough to take the smallest notice of it. Her incorrigibly youthful and daring soul always bore her in that direction right up to the end of her life. Coincident with the affair with the Chevalier we find a sort of understanding with the fair-haired Swede, Ribbing, and when he left for America in the spring of 1796, it gave the Ambassadors "a cruel shock," of which she coquettishly informed the Chevalier.

We may add that this article in the *Revue des deux Mondes* considerably simplifies the tangle of Madame de Staël's emotional experiences.

If we cannot arrive at knowing the woman herself her career must remain a mystery. *She was wont to snatch, or try to snatch, just those qualities which pleased her, from every individual she met just when she needed them.*

It was the balance and sagacity of the Chevalier de Pange which fascinated her in contrast to her own tormented soul.

This is perfectly clear from their correspondence. At the same time, other facets of her many-sided being responded to Constant and Ribbing, both of whom she really needed.

In July, 1796, the very month of the Chevalier's premature death, there is a half-formed rumour of another quasi-sentimental indiscretion which her vigilant cousin, Madame Necker de Saussure, managed to snuff out. (P. Gautier, *Matthieu de Montmorency et Madame de Staël*, page 71.)

In order to complete the catalogue, Talleyrand (before his fall) must be added, and Matthieu de Montmorency, whose political conversion throws a doubt upon the nature of his friendship.

All this may seem to make more of a tangle than ever ;

APPENDIX C

but as a matter of fact, her own versatility and the many demands of her nature explain the whole thing.

The two emotional poles in the *Passions* are Narbonne at one end, and Constant at the other ; and between them, a fleeting vision of ideal love with de Pange.

The other little affairs are on a lower plane.

Note, Page 213.

See *Œuvres*, page 217. At about this time M. de Staël announced his wish to retire to Sweden, taking his wife with him. In order to avert this catastrophe she was, for the moment, prepared to divorce him, and marry Constant. (See P. Gautier, *Matthieu de Montmorency et Madame de Staël*, page 181.)

Note 1, Page 224.

See Welschinger, *La Censure sur le Premier Empire*, 1882, pages 163, 325.

Note 2, Page 224.

See *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th Feb., 1913, article by d'Haussonville, *Madame de Staël à Coppet pendant la Révolution et la Directoire*.

Note, Page 225.

See *Œuvres*, page 228. The first edition was published in Paris. A second impression in Lausanne.

Note, Page 226.

See *Mémoires de Barras*, quoted by Hériot, *op. cit.*, page 72. M. de Staël, as his wife admitted, "comported himself without any angry expression of opinion, and even displayed a kindly interest in the situation!" (See P. Gautier, *Matthieu de Montmorency et Madame de Staël*, page 108.)

The birth took place in Paris on the 8th. Consult also

MADAME DE STAËL

the important letter of M. de Montmorency to Madame Necker de Saussure (14th Dec., 1796), from which it appears that Madame de Staël was then so much in love with Constant as to be willing to divorce her husband and marry Benjamin. Matthieu, who had not foreseen this development of so intellectual a conjunction, was full of consternation at the prospect.

In June, 1797, M. de Staël began to suggest divorce, but Madame de Staël had then changed her mind.

Note, Page 228.

See Blennerhasset, Vol. II, page 350. For his stay in America see the article of M. Baldensperger, *Revue de Paris*, 15th Nov., 1924, *Le Séjour de Talleyrand aux États-Unis*.

Note, Page 230.

Considérations, Vol. II, page 206. Compare with this verses from *Jean de Witt*, composed by Madame de Staël in 1797.

C'est anisi que Nassau marche à l'autorité,
Quel augure, Grand Dieu ! pour notre liberté !
Je crains son caractère et jusqu'à sa sagesse,
Ce calme inattérable au sein de la jeunesse,
Loui de me rassurer me remplit de tereure,
Son intérêt dégà seul commande à son cœur.
On ne voit rien en lui qui soit involuntaire,
Chaque pas a son bout, chaque mot son mystère.
Ses traits qu'à peine vignt aus ont embellis
Par de long souvenir semblent dégà flétris,
La vieillesse s'y place à côté de l'enfance."

The parallel to this is brought to our notice by d'Haussonville, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1st March, 1913.

Note, Page 242.

Madame de Staël had written in December, 1795 :
"Enlightened men are so frequently quite irresponsible that I see a pressing need fo attaching men of property to our cause." (Letter to the Chevalier de Pange, *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th Oct., 1924.)

APPENDIX C

See also Madame de Staël's letter to Alexandre de Lameth, 24th Nov., 1796 (*Revue des Documents Historiques*, 1878).

In 1798, Necker was trying to invest capital in France, with his daughter as intermediary. (*Revue des deux Mondes*, May 1st, 1913.)

Note, Page 260.

On the 25th *brumaire*, Necker wrote to his daughter :
"Dearest Minette,

"I received your letter of the 20th. I can well imagine all the rejoicings in Paris and the part you are playing in glorifying your hero, etc., etc."

(*Revue des deux Mondes*, March 1st, 1913.) Madame de Staël's letter to Necker seems to have been destroyed.

Note 1, Page 265.

"The philosopher's flag was now flown over ambulances." See Merlet : *Tableau de la Littérature Française*, Vol. III, page 97.

Note 2, Page 265.

Madame de Staël called Bonald, "the philosopher of antiphilosophy."

Note, Page 207.

Spectateur du Nord : 1799, Vol. III, p. 324-335. See also on Charles de Villiers : Isler. *Briefe aus des Nachlass von C. de Villiers* (Hambourg, 1879) ; and Witmer, L.

Charles de Villiers, un Intermediare entre la France et l'Allemagne et un Précurseur de Madame de Staël.

The Spectateur du Nord, Vol. 5, said :

"Everything that Madame de Staël knows about Germany and German Literature is taken from M. de Villier's article."

For her knowledge of German Literature before 1800, see Jorel : *Madame de Staël et la Cour littéraire de Weimar*, page 13 ; and d'Haussonville, *Revue des deux Mondes*, 1st Dec., 1913, page 552.

INDEX

Amours de Milord Edouard
 (Rousseau), 57 (note)
 Berry, Miss, 78
 Bonald, *Theorie*, 265
British Théâtre (Bell), 49
 (note)
 Chateaubriand, *Essai sur*
les Révolutions, 265
Comte - rendu (by M.
 Necker), 11
 Condorcet, *Esquisse*, 265
 Constant, 225, 231 *seq.*,
 262
Correspondance Littéraire,
 11
 Dante, *Inferno*, 166
 De Bouffler, Madame, 76,
 78
 De Broglie, Duc, 17
 De Constant, Charles and
 Rosalie, 77, 156
 De Genlis, Madame, 7
 De Guibert, M., 123
 De Guibert, M., 8, 124
 De Jaucourt, Chevalier,
 130 *seq.*
 De Maistre, Joseph, *Con-*
sidérations sur la Révo-
lution Française, 265
 De Narbonne, 127 *seq.*, 131
 De Staël, Auguste, 82 (note)
 De Staël, Madame

LIFE :

Childhood, 3 *seq.*
 Idea of her marrying
 Wm. Pitt, 13, 14
 Visited London, 19
 At Lausanne, 20
 Journal, 22 *seq.*
 Marriage (1786), 34
 At Versailles and
 Paris, Chap. V.
 The French Revolu-
 tion, Chap. VII.
 Departure from Paris,
 131
 With de Narbonne in
 Surrey, 131 *seq.*
 Seeks to "remake the
 foundations of her
 life," 158
 To England, 158
 To Paris, 177
 To Coppet, when or-
 dered to leave Paris
 (1795), 183
 Met Bonaparte, 229
seq.
 To Switzerland (1798),
 230
 Divorced, 231

WORKS :

Recueil de Morceaux
Detachés (Histoire de

INDEX

- Pauline, Mirza, Adélaïde et Théodore*,
 34, 54 seq., 59 seq.,
 85, 148, 157
Théodore et Adelaïde,
 35
Œuvres, 35, 148
Sophie ou les Sentiments Secrets, 35
Jane Grey, 35 seq.
Montmorency, 35, 122
Synonymes, 35
Folle de la Forêt de Senart, 35
Eloge de Guibert, 40,
 122
Lettres sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau,
 78, 80 to 114
Delphine, 87, 94 (note),
 171, 173 (note)
Corinne, 87, 171
The Drawbacks to Life in Paris, 108
Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine, 137
 (note)
Zulma, 138
Diary, 138
L'Épître au Malheur,
 144
Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine, 149
Considérations sur le Procès de la Reine,
 155
Essai sur les Fictions,
 156
De la Littérature, 158,
 222 seq., 255 (note),
 263 seq.
De l'Influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations, 131, 159,
 189 seq., 232
Essai sur les Fictions,
 163 seq.
Réflexions sur la Paix adressées à M. Pitt,
 174, 177 sq.
Réflexions sur la Paix intérieure, 180 seq.
Concerning the strength of the present Government and the necessity of supporting it, 225
Des Circonstances, 232
 seq., 255 (note), 257
 seq.
Literature considered in relation to social institutions, 299 seq.
Verse quotations, 307
 seq.
De Villers, C., 279, and
 note
Diary and Letters (of Madame d'Arblay), 132
 (note)
Drawbacks of Life in Paris,
 12
Du Caractère de Madame Necker, 16 (note)
Du Caractère de M. Necker,
 18
Fersen, 140 (note)

INDEX

- French Revolution, Chap.
VII., 117
- Gautier, P., *Le Premier
Exile de Madame de
Staël*, 177 (note)
- Godwin, *Political Justice*,
159, 265; *Caleb Wil-
liams*, 170
- Gustave III et la Cour de
France, 34 (note), 59
(note)
- Huber, Mlle., 4
- Ideés Morales de Madame
de Staël*, 151 (note)
- Indépendants* (Journal), 128
- Jugements Historiques et
Littéraire*, 16 (note)
- Lally-Tollendal, 130, 131
- Les Effets de la Terreur*,
226
- Meister, 11, 28, 35, 80
- Mélanges, 17
- Memoire pour la défense du
roi*, 142
- Malouet, 131
- Milton, John, 165
- Montmorency, 131
- Morris, Gouverneur, 78
- Napoleon Bonaparte, 229
seq., 261
- Necker, Madame, 117
- Necker de Saussure,
Madame, 3, 4, 18 (note),
37, 77
- Pitt, Wm., 13, 14
- Réactions Politiques*, 226
- Rousseau, J. J., 12
- Sainte-Beuve, 80, *Portraits
de Femmes*, 173 (note)
- Spenser, *Faery Queene*, 165
- Talleyrand, 131, 228
- Trochin, Dr., 6
- Viénot, *Des Religions*, 246
(note)

